

INTRODUCTION

The failures of the “international community” in the 1990s are well known. From April to June 1994, Hutu extremists killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and Hutu moderates in Rwanda as the United Nations scaled back its peacekeeping presence there. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces killed thousands of Bosnian Muslim men and boys from Srebrenica, a UN “safe haven.” Most commentators agree that these were cases where military action should have been used more forcibly to protect civilian life. Yet there have also been cases where military action was used more forcibly for putatively humanitarian ends, resulting in intensified violence and further loss of civilian life—the protection, perhaps, of *some* others at the expense of *other* others (Bulley 2010). The 1999 NATO air war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in an attempt to protect Kosovar Albanians from ethnic cleansing, killed around 500 civilians (both Serbs and Kosovar Albanians) (HRW 2000) and escalated the ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians at the hands of the Serbian forces (HRW 2001). In Libya, although NATO is widely credited with preventing a massacre in Benghazi, its bombs directly killed at least 72 civilians over the course of the eight-month campaign (HRW 2012). In addition, by supporting the rebels, NATO’s intervention not only arguably gave cover to *their* atrocities against regime loyalists (Paris 2014) but also perhaps even lengthened a civil war that was about to end, thereby indirectly bringing about, by one calculation, seven times as many casualties as could have been expected if it had not intervened (Kuperman 2013); furthermore, its intervention and the ensuing regime change contributed to the broader proliferation of weapons and instability in the region (Anderson 2015; Strazzari and Tholens 2014), with obvious negative effects on civilian security.

As someone who became politically conscious during the 1990s, I grew increasingly troubled by this seeming choice facing the “international community” between, on the one hand, “doing nothing” and thereby letting wrongs—violence and injustice—persist, and, on the other hand, “doing something” in the form of military action and thereby producing further wrongs in the process. The initial puzzle driving this project, then, was this: how can we¹ confront wrongs—such as violence and injustice—powerfully and effectively without creating further wrongs in the process? In posing this question I realize that this may in fact be an insoluble dilemma. As I note later in the context of “poststructuralist ethics,” it may be part of the human condition that we need to do wrong in order to confront wrong, with each step in any direction infused with some measure of harm to someone else. In what follows, then, I do not claim to have neatly solved this dilemma. I do, however, hope to suggest for serious consideration forms of action—namely, nonviolent struggle, nonviolent intervention, and nonviolent defense—that are better positioned to respond to the dual imperatives noted here but that are often disregarded by those who think military action is the only viable option when we face a *particular* type of adversary or where success *really* matters. In doing so, I also point to the ways in which our habitual dependence on military action blinds us to its own inadequacies when it comes to righting wrongs effectively.

Although my field of vision in responding to this question includes a range of nonviolent alternatives meant to confront injustice and violence (and some combination of both), my real focus here is on strategies for confronting violence. It is more widely acknowledged that

nonviolent action can be effective at countering injustice in the long term than that it can be effective at stopping physical violence immediately. So, my more specific questions are these: what can nonviolence do in the face of violence to protect people *now*? And how, practically speaking, can nonviolent action be a tool not only for justice but also for security? In this sense, I am responding to Howes' (2009) call for an investigation into the practical nonviolent tools available for confronting violence, a question he explores theoretically. These questions narrow my focus to nonviolent *intervention* (also commonly called unarmed civilian peacekeeping [UCP])—and, empirically, to the work of one international NGO and one location in particular: Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka. This choice can be understood as a “least likely” case selection insofar as the ability of nonviolence to prevent and protect people from violence in the midst of armed conflict and counterinsurgency (in this case the resurgence of Sri Lanka’s civil war between January 2008 and May 2009 and the widespread political violence that accompanied it) would seem to be the greatest challenge for the effectiveness of nonviolence.

This empirical focus therefore situates my project more squarely within debates on humanitarian intervention and, more recently, the “Responsibility to Protect.” My preoccupation with this particular part of the broader puzzle above—the question of intervention—has, no doubt, much to do with my own position in the international system as a citizen of the United States, the state upon which many of these decisions about military intervention have hinged since the end of the Cold War. And though this project is motivated by my own dissatisfaction with the framing of the choices seemingly available to the UN (or powerful UN member states like the U.S.) in situations of mass violence inside other states, I also recognize that the response offered here stays within the confines of this framing in at least one respect: it still puts forward external *intervention*—even in a radically different and unarmed form—as an important strategy for countering violence. I am mindful of the assumptions that might be associated with such an approach, casting, as it seems to, the problem as “local” and the solution as “international” (Orford 2003), with little agency attributed to local actors. Positing intervention as a response to violence seemingly assumes that local actors are incapable of stopping it themselves and echoes the tired old colonial narrative of perpetrator, victim, and savior (Mamdani 2007). Not only is there the danger that civilians in the society in question will be cast as powerless, without the capacity for political action themselves, and therefore in need of outside intervention to “save” them, but there is the perhaps graver danger of dehumanizing the “perpetrators” as we deny them any status as reflexive, thinking moral agents. This is particularly the case, though, when such intervention is military, as military intervention not only often seeks to dictate a new political reality, but also requires a willingness to use violence against those identified as perpetrators and therefore an ability to disconnect to some extent from their humanity and from their capacity as individuals to reflect, dissent, or change. (Think, for instance, of common representations in the West of Hutu *génocidaires*, Bosnian Serb forces, and, more recently, ISIS fighters; they are widely considered to be monolithically evil, beyond the pale, incapable of reflection or change, and responsive only to “force.”) In exploring nonviolent intervention and suggesting it as a viable alternative to military intervention, then, I do so in a critical spirit, keeping at the forefront of these considerations questions about power, difference, and the post-colonial context in which these interventions play out. As I will argue, nonviolent intervention/unarmed civilian peacekeeping is better suited to address these questions and to resist reproducing colonial dynamics, as it is a form of action that, rather than dictating new political realities, self-consciously supports the agency and activism of local actors, and that is necessarily more open to

the reflexivity and humanity of *all* actors, perpetrators included (even if it does not *depend* on such qualities to work).

That said, it became glaringly clear to me early on in my field research, in a conversation I had with fellow political science graduate students at the University of Colombo, both that the unarmed status of the kind of intervention I was interested in did not insulate it from post-colonial power dynamics and that my research topic was very much a product of my own particular position in the world. I had just met these students for the first time, and as I began telling them about my dissertation research on Nonviolent Peaceforce, the immediate response was to question my focus on international actors—particularly an international NGO—rather than on local actors and movements. There was the widespread impression that NGOs were only in it for the money and that international NGOs, in particular, dampened the voluntarism of local actors, especially in the wake of the 2004 tsunami.² It was then that I articulated for the first time the reason for my focus on *international* rather than local actors, the need for an alternative to military humanitarian intervention at the international level; and the articulation itself—as well as the recognition of my own discomfort in delivering it—made me realize the particularity, rather than self-evidence, of such a focus. (I should mention, however, that later on in my time in Sri Lanka, one of the graduate students who was more familiar than others with Nonviolent Peaceforce’s work in Sri Lanka’s East through some of her own humanitarian work there, noted that—though others might see it as “just another NGO working on the conflict”—her impression was that people in the East saw its work as effective and its presence as necessary.) I insist on the importance of focusing on an international actor, then, even as I recognize the critiques leveled against such a focus, because international interventions will continue to happen—for a mixture of motives, to be sure, some we might find laudable, some we might find nefarious—and it is therefore incumbent on me, as a citizen of a country responsible for many such interventions, to explore ways in which they can more genuinely embody the humanitarian motives that justify them and more critically respond to the power dynamics of the post-colonial context in which they are carried out. Otherwise, as long as military intervention is assumed to be the most viable policy for protecting civilians from widespread violence (as part of R2P’s “responsibility to react”), then the U.S. will continue to have ample justification for waging its “humanitarian wars” (Roberts 1993).

Chapter summary and research methodology

Before we can explore nonviolent alternatives to military action, however, we must understand why and how military options fall short. The book begins, then, with a critical investigation into two assumptions about violence central to political theory and international relations (IR) theory. The first (and the subject of Chapter 1) is the assumption that it is possible to draw a clear line between legitimate and illegitimate violence—an assumption crucial to just war theory and other moral frameworks that attempt to discern the principles by which and conditions under which war can be justified. Much rides on this distinction, because violence without legitimation is experienced as the bare, physical brutality of violence itself, widely considered a wrong. I argue that such attempts to draw this distinction are plagued by two key dangers: the problem of disagreement over which principles are the correct ones for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate violence (and over the application of those principles) and the problem of uncertainty over whether one’s own moral framework for making this distinction is, in fact, the

“true” one. The former problem results in cycles of violence, and the latter problem means that it is always a possibility that our own use of violence is unjust.

The second assumption interrogated here (in Chapter 2) is that of the effectiveness and necessity of violence. This assumption is fundamental to IR theory where the ultimate “self-help” mechanism available to states in the anarchic international system is the threat or use of military force (Waltz 1979). Even those who argue for the use of military force as a “last resort” are attributing to violence the ability to get things done, to “work.” I open up and critique this assumption first by elaborating on Schelling’s (1976) distinction between “brute force” and “coercion”—and their bearing on capability and will—arguing that coercion’s “power to hurt” is more often the actual mechanism in operation when violence “works” and that therefore there is no *a priori* reason why military action would be more effective than other nonviolent forms of action that can also operate through coercion. Furthermore, the effectiveness of violence as a coercive tool would seem to hinge on whether one’s own threat or use of military action diminishes or invigorates the opponent’s willingness to fight, and I argue that often it does the latter even if we expect it to do the former. Finally, I examine how military action is used for each of three objectives—defense, protection, and victory—outlining how it falls short in achieving them, both when these objectives are traditionally understood and when they are revised to incorporate more inclusive conceptions of identity and security.

With space now cleared, I turn, in Chapter 3, to an exploration of nonviolent alternatives—forms of nonviolent action that can be used to achieve victory (nonviolent struggle) but also to protect civilians (nonviolent intervention) and defend political communities (nonviolent defense). It is here that I present one of my central arguments, that nonviolent action (in its various forms) is the best kind of action we have for pursuing our own particular moral commitments while at the same time acknowledging their contestability and contingency; in other words, nonviolent action embodies the use of power towards particular ends that we may consider worthy but also the refusal to efface difference and alterity in the process. Turning to an explication of nonviolent struggle, nonviolent intervention, and nonviolent defense, I argue that each form of nonviolent action operates via a combination of coercive and transformative mechanisms, whereas violence has access primarily only to the former; nonviolent action, therefore, is a *practical, non-utopian* form of action with two kinds of power at its disposal, equipped to deal with both unsavory, intransigent adversaries and with more reflexive ones.

To delve deeper into one particular form of nonviolent action—nonviolent intervention—I turn to the case of Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka (NPSL), an INGO engaged in unarmed civilian peacekeeping in Sri Lanka from 2003 to 2011 and whose work I researched from September to December 2008, as the war escalated between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in the North and as other forms of political violence plagued civilians throughout the country. I carried out my ethnographic field research on NPSL predominantly in Colombo, Sri Lanka’s largest city, situated on the southwest coast, where NPSL had its administrative headquarters and where I spent a couple days a week interviewing field team members who were passing through on their way to or from the field sites in the North/East, reading through internal documents (field reports, etc.), and taking regular field notes. I took two trips to NPSL’s field sites in the East, first to Trincomalee and then to Batticaloa and Valachchenai, where I also interviewed international and national field staff. I

conducted interviews (some individual, some group) with a total of eighteen NPSL staff members, and I also attended various multi-day staff strategizing meetings. Although I would have preferred to have also interviewed civilian and armed actors who directly interacted with NPSL in order to inquire into whether/how NPSL's presence and activities influenced their thinking and behavior, constraints on my research prohibited me from doing so. The conclusions I reach, therefore, are based on NPSL staff (both Sri Lankan and international) representations of their work in Sri Lanka and my own observations. Exploring peacekeepers' understandings of their day-to-day activities is a valuable enterprise in and of itself, however, as it mines the important knowledge they have developed from participating in these activities (Furnari 2014).³ Furthermore, NPSL staff members, like the peacekeepers Furnari interviewed, "look to local people for confirmation of their impact" (2014, 69) and as such are a source of knowledge as to the influence of their efforts on a range of actors. Of course, we must be careful to remember that these are necessarily NPSL staff members' *interpretations* of their influence and of others' decision-making processes and that they might have been inclined to represent their work in the best light possible. To the extent that most of them were just as ready to mention shortcomings as successes, however, I feel confident that there are not egregious misrepresentations in this regard.

The other part of my time in Sri Lanka was spent as a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of Colombo where I participated in various academic workshops and had access to a video archive of thirty-two interviews with Sri Lankan women about their experiences of the war. As I note in Chapter 5, the combatants interviewed in this video archive provide me with a second-best source for examining the ways in which individual combatants like them might have made sense of their participation in violence and therefore might have responded to some of NPSL's activities.

My aim in investigating the case of unarmed civilian peacekeeping in Sri Lanka is twofold: first, to understand the discursive strategies used to legitimate—and therefore make possible—the violence on either side of the conflict in Sri Lanka (in an attempt to disarticulate the causes of *violent* conflict from the causes of conflict), and second, to understand how UCP worked to protect civilians and prevent violence in that context and what challenges and limits it faced. Chapters 4 and 5 address the first aim by 1) analyzing the speeches of then Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa and LTTE leader Prabhakaran to delineate the contours of the official discourses on either side and 2) analyzing the news media accounts of particular acts of violence, as well as interviews with combatants on either side (mentioned above), to understand how those supporting the GoSL and the LTTE, respectively, made sense of their own and the other side's use of violence. Prominent here is the use of international norms by both sides to buttress their claims to legitimate violence, as well as the way in which the other side's violence tends to easily affirm the discourse legitimating one's own violence (whereas one's own violence—depending on whom it targets and how—requires more work to integrate into one's discourse).

Both Chapters 6 and 7 address the second aim of understanding how UCP worked in this context and what challenges it faced. Chapter 6 begins with the recognition of Nonviolent Peaceforce's key weakness: its inability—at least with the limited resources and access it had—to stop the violence on the battlefield of Sri Lanka's renewed civil war or protect the large number of civilians who were trapped in the war zone in early 2009. I then proceed to inquire into the

potential ability of *any* form of action—armed or unarmed, internal or external—to achieve such a feat. To do so, I first analyze the psycho-discursive conditions that make violence—and particularly violence against civilians—possible, and then, on the basis of this analysis, develop a psycho-discursive theory of civilian protection and violence prevention. This theory, along with a more traditional rationalist framework, enables us to interpret the effects or likely effects of various forms of armed or unarmed action for civilian protection and violence prevention—none of which could have immediately stopped the violence on the battlefield without escalating it first. After situating NPSL within the taxonomy of nonviolent action presented in Chapter 3, I turn in Chapter 7 to a full exploration of the mechanisms involved in NPSL’s efforts to protect civilians in Sri Lanka. Drawing on interviews with NPSL staff members, I explore both deterrence and psycho-discursive pressures as the primary mechanisms at work, highlighting how they operated in NPSL’s civilian protection and violence prevention efforts at the community level. Next, I address the central question of how NPSL’s unarmed status influenced the work it was able to do. Reflecting on the differences between armed and unarmed intervention/peacekeeping forces, NPSL staff members argued that being unarmed allowed them greater access to and better relationships with the community—enabling them to more effectively carry out their work—but that it also made them and the people they protected less vulnerable than they would have been if armed. I close with a brief discussion of the organizational challenges NPSL faced.

I conclude by reflecting on the “boundary conditions” of unarmed civilian peacekeeping and the implications of my findings for the theory and practice of global politics, as well as by opening up the civilian/combatant distinction that I have up until this point left largely intact.

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¹ I use the terms "we," "us," and "our" throughout the book very expansively (except where otherwise noted) to mean any of us, members of the human community, on various sides of conflict and with competing conceptions of justice, who feel there are wrongs to be addressed, who have the capacity to legitimate, employ, and experience violence, and who contend with the problems violence creates in human relations. I presume no agreement as to what constitutes a "wrong" in different contexts; in particular, I am leaving open and unspecified the content of "injustice" and "justice" in this study so as to allow for radical differences on these questions.

² There is an important distinction to note here, however, between humanitarian INGOs that provide relief, offering material goods and rebuilding in the wake of the tsunami, for instance, and an INGO like Nonviolent Peaceforce that offers no material goods, only security, though the broader concern about building dependence may be relevant in both cases.

³ My research focus on NPSL can also be understood in the context of the move in anthropology towards "studying up" (Nader 1972).