CHAPTER 1

Introducing the Research
Questions and Methodology

1.1 Introduction to the Research

This book is part of a larger research project on the failure to prevent genocide, ethnic cleansing and gross human rights violations in Rwanda (1994), Srebrenica (1995) and Darfur (2003/04). In addition to providing in-depth analysis on the international response to the crisis in Darfur, this book has a limited comparative scope. It will compare the qualitative evidence collected for these three conflicts and make some broader generalisations in the final chapter.

The central proposition in these three projects is that the third party or external bystander matters for the outcome of (intra-state) conflicts. When we study international relations from the perspective of the bystander-actor at the international level, we think that other states and international organisations have the ability to shape the course of a conflict. The latter also assumes that there is a certain degree of international order and a degree of international responsibility or even duty for a state beyond its own borders. This assumption has consequences for the academic theoretical approach we may use in the study of our topic, since it implies that we can use other theoretical approaches that deal with international norms and roles for international organisations. At the international political level, that responsibility was expressed in the doctrine of “Responsibility to Protect,” which was affirmed by all UN member states in the Outcome Document of the World Summit in 2005 and reaffirmed in a Security Council resolution in 2006.

One underlying objective of this study is to critically reflect on certain justifications or excuses used to deny any responsibility. Bystanders of the Shoah

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during WOII, and later of the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica during 1990s can be characterised as idle and passive onlookers. Four arguments are always used to explain why these bystanders did not act to rescue the victims:

1. The notion that “we did not know” about what was going on exactly (in German this sounds even more alarming);
2. Had we known it, we could not have responded to it, because we did not have the appropriate means or instruments to react;
3. A response would likely have counterproductive effects;
4. In case we have the knowledge and the warnings and the instruments are available to act with no serious counterproductive effects, the political will to act was lacking.

In this book we will address all four notions and counter these arguments in order to determine that international bystanders did know what was happening, they did have the instruments available to act to stop the Gross Human Rights Violations (GHRV) and acting was less harmful than not acting. Moreover, in our view the very general and rather vague concept of “political will” needs to be unravelled in order to truly understand the behaviour of third parties on gross human rights violations and that is why, among other reasons, we will pay attention to domestic (internal) influences and cognitive and psychological mechanisms in analysing the foreign policy-making of the bystander states.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions in this study are linked to the four defensive arguments put forward in hindsight by the bystanders when they express their remorse or apologies for not acting. We would like to falsify these four excuses for the case of Darfur in answering the following questions for the policy-makers in other states and international organisations:

6 The infamous excuse for not acting or rescuing the victims of all bystanders at all levels during the Holocaust/Shoah was “Wir haben es nicht gewusst,” Bart van der Boom explained that these words did not mean the literal “not to know” or “to ignore” but signified an insincere attitude of burying your head in the sand (in Dutch “een onoprechte houding van alsof je neus bloedt,” see Boom, B.E., van der, 2012, Wij weten niets van hun lot. Amsterdam: Boom, p. 8).