

Huguenots, Humanitarianism, and International Society

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...a horrible massacre having been committed in Paris on the 24th of August last, in which a great many noblemen and faithful were killed in one day and one night, coming up to twelve or thirteen thousand people, and preaching having been forbidden throughout the kingdom, and the belongings of those of the Religion pillaged throughout the kingdom; for their consolation, and that of the Low Countries, and in order to pray to the Lord for their deliverance, a solemn fast was held.¹

This paper is about the dynamic relationship between moral obligation and sovereignty. Specifically, this paper will argue that the history of humanitarianism is not only the story of changing practices of moral obligation, but it is also the story of how these moral obligations have contributed to shifting constructions of statehood. Looking through the prism of moral obligation will reveal how state identity both creates the possibility for states to enact obligations to non-citizens, as well as helps to define the limits of those obligations – the boundaries between Self and Other. The case of Huguenot refugees in 16th century England sheds light on how relationships of moral obligation contributed to the newly emerging principle of sovereignty as the defining principle of international order.

The paper has two overarching goals. The first is to broaden conventional understandings of humanitarianism through historical analysis. Discussions about humanitarianism are usually limited to the relatively recent past, with the result that the concept of humanitarianism is only understood in terms of the present: it has been de-

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¹ Description of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, quoted in Bernard Cottret, *The Huguenots in England: Immigration and Settlement c. 1550-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.

historicized and accepted as unproblematic. The inattention to humanitarianism's historical roots has the consequence of reifying the meaning of humanitarianism in terms of the present, which in turn ignores the contingency of humanitarian practice and discourse on time and place. Moreover, many research questions about humanitarianism focus on the question of *what* humanitarian obligations look like to the exclusion of *how* those obligations have been formed in the first place. Asking the latter question opens up the possibility of seeing how states have experienced different types of moral obligations towards non-citizens in various times and places. If it is true that modern humanitarianism is but one class of moral obligation to non-citizens amongst many, this raises the following questions: what have different forms of moral obligation looked like in the past? I argue that understanding different types of moral obligation will help to shed light on how modern humanitarianism, as one particular construction of moral obligation, has become "logically possible."²

The second goal of this paper is to examine how the institution of sovereignty has been partially constituted through relationships of moral obligation. I argue that one cannot understand the story of modern humanitarianism outside the wider context of how sovereignty has come to be defined as a basic principle of international relations. Sovereignty is regarded as the defining principle of the modern international system, whereby states differentiate themselves from other states. Furthermore, sovereignty also implies that a state's obligations are primarily towards its own citizens (although these obligations change according to time, place, and form of government). In other words, by serving as the defining principle of legitimate authority within a state, the concept of

² Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

sovereignty also acts to demarcate where moral obligations end – which is usually at the border.

However, historical practice has shown that moral obligations do not always conform to the borders of sovereign states, and that there is a complex relationship between sovereignty and moral obligation. In other words, discourses of moral obligation have much to reveal about changing constructions of state identity, as well as practices of statehood. State identities are not carved in the stone of sovereignty, but rather the practice of sovereignty also changes as it is informed by different constructions of obligation. These practices help to inform the identity of the state as Self, and of those outside the state as Other. The relationship between Self/State and Other becomes the basis for defining legitimate acts of moral obligation – as well as the limits of those obligations. Moreover, practices of moral obligation, as social acts, are mechanisms of productive power that define who holds moral obligations, what those obligations entail, as well as the limits of obligations. Moral obligations serve to establish the boundaries of moral community, which defines to whom moral obligations both do and do not apply, as well as gives meaning to the identities of the participants and the acts themselves. In other words, there is a process of mutual constitution between acts of moral obligation, and the identities of those participating in those acts. This paper will investigate one example of humanitarian action at the time of the emergence of the modern-state system, the case of French Huguenot refugees in 16th century England. This task of broadening both historical and theoretical understandings of humanitarianism squares nicely with the wider objective of this panel, which is to examine the historical constitution of sovereignty as a basic principle of international society.

The paper will proceed as follows. In the first section, a discussion of some critical literature on sovereignty will help to locate this paper within the wider project of understanding how sovereignty has come to be a fundamental, albeit contested, institution of international order. It will go on to provide a necessarily brief overview of recent research on humanitarianism, and identify some of the historical and theoretical limitations of current approaches to the subject. The second part will examine the case of the Protestant refugees in England during the European religious wars, in particular the first waves of immigration during the reign of Elizabeth I. I must offer the caveat that, since this research is in its initial stages, the case study is more a “plausibility probe” than a final product. It will, however, demonstrate the value of historical case study and indicate directions for future research. The final section will draw some parallels between 16th century and contemporary beliefs about humanitarianism, respond to some possible objections, and provide some directions for future research.

Constructing sovereignty

In the realist tradition, sovereignty is explained as a necessary mitigation of the anarchy of the international system. Modern practices of sovereignty arose out of the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, when European monarchs agreed to the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. Its intellectual heritage derives from the writings of Thomas Hobbes, who wrote about the necessity of pooling authority in the Leviathan, in order to escape from the lawlessness of the state of nature.³ Much more recently, Kenneth Waltz described world politics as a self-help system, in which anarchy is the defining

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Books, 1968 [1651]).

principle of the international system, and argued that states can only distinguish themselves by their relative power.⁴ In short, sovereignty is a legitimising principle for the demarcation of borders between states, as well as the exercise of absolute authority within those borders. As Anthony Giddens has written, “Sovereignty is linked to the replacement of ‘frontiers’ by ‘borders’ in the early development of the nation-state system: autonomy inside the territory claimed by the state is sanctioned by the recognition of borders by other states.”⁵

Over the past decade or so, a number of works have tried to open up the black box of sovereignty in order to show how this basic principle of international relations, far from being unproblematic, is an essentially contested concept. At the heart of these critiques is the argument that sovereignty has become oversimplified and reified, a static concept that does not reflect actual practice. For instance, Jens Bartelson begins his inquiry not by asking, “What *is* sovereignty?” but rather, “What is the relationship between sovereignty and truth?”⁶ Bartelson writes a genealogy of sovereignty that is not so concerned with finding the meaning of the concept as it is with exploring its relationship to the conditions of knowledge that produce meaning. He assumes that knowledge is political, so since politics is based on knowledge, any attempt to find a scientific understanding of sovereignty will ignore how it is based on intersubjective understandings, and not an empirical reality.⁷ Bartelson argues that lines between the domestic and the international

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

⁵ Anthony Giddens, "The Globalizing of Modernity," in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, ed. David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 64.

⁶ Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid*, 14-15.

are treated as if they were self-evident and natural, instead of contingent on knowledge structures and power.⁸

Bartelson's argument falls along similar lines to that of R.B.J. Walker, who tries to understand how sovereignty is a historically constituted concept that creates epistemological categories for thinking about what is "inside" the state, and what lies "outside." He writes,

[The] principle of sovereignty did not appear out of thin air. It embodies an historically specific account of ethical possibility in the form of an answer to questions about the nature and location of political community.... Spatially, the principle of state sovereignty fixes a clear demarcation between life inside and outside a centred political community.⁹

Like Bartelson, Walker is concerned with the conditions of knowledge that makes the concept of sovereignty possible, but he is also concerned with how the construction of sovereignty has led to the assumption that the international realm is devoid of ethics. A discursive boundary has been built between "inside" and "outside" the state, between Self and Other. The principle of sovereignty implies that the good life can only occur "inside" political communities,¹⁰ while what is "outside," that is international relations, is inevitably opposed to political theory, citizenship, or justice. Walker is ultimately interested in challenging these constructions of Self and Other, in order to affirm the possibility of an ethical world politics that disintegrates the divisions between political theory and international relations, and between citizenship and humanity.¹¹

⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

⁹ R.B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 63-64.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 181. See also Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (Houndmills: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1982).

Finally, Cynthia Weber examines sovereignty through the logic of representation and simulation. Along a similar path as Bartelson and Walker, Weber argues that representations of sovereignty are historically contingent and contested. She writes,

This struggle is the struggle to fix the meaning of sovereignty in such a way as to constitute a particular state – to write the state – with particular boundaries, competencies and legitimacies available to it. This is not a one-time occurrence which fixes the meaning of sovereignty and statehood for all time in all places; rather, this struggle is repeated in various forms at numerous spatial and temporal locales.¹²

By problematising the process through which sovereignty produces identities and boundaries, Weber goes so far as to challenge the very existence of the modern state and its authority. If statehood is nothing more than simulation, it is necessary to understand the processes through which it is reproduced and legitimated.

The common theme through all the works above is that they attempt to show how sovereignty is an essentially fluid concept, which is both historically contingent and productive in how it draws discursive boundaries between the Self and Other. This paper cuts into the concept of sovereignty through the lens of moral obligation, and ultimately argues that changing practices of sovereignty also reveal how the boundaries of moral communities are constructed. I now turn to a brief review of some recent research on humanitarianism.

Broadening Humanitarian Norms

Alongside public debate about humanitarian intervention, the constructivist turn in IR theory opened up the study of humanitarian practices as part of the larger project of understanding how norms function in international politics. Constructivists conceive of

¹² Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

international politics as a social sphere of interaction, in contrast with the materialist approaches of neorealism and neoliberalism.¹³ According to constructivist logic, states engage in humanitarian practices because they have been socialised to do so. Interests are not based on rational calculation of consequences, but rather, they arise out of a state's beliefs about what is appropriate behaviour.¹⁴ Following this, a norm exists when there are "collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity"¹⁵

Much of the constructivist research on humanitarianism tries to identify the recent emergence of a norm of humanitarian intervention, which has given rise to new patterns of state behaviour. For example, Martha Finnemore has argued that, while the use of force is not a new phenomenon, the beliefs that define a state's values and goals have changed the form and meaning of military interventions. Whereas interventions in the 19th century were interest-based and unilateral, contemporary understandings of humanitarian intervention require multilateral action and a more universal definition of who deserves humanitarian protection. In short, Finnemore shows how change has occurred in the practice of intervention, and that these changes cannot be understood outside their normative

¹³ See Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations*, 3.3 (1997): 319-365; John G. Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization*, 52 (Autumn 1998), 855-885.

¹⁴ For discussion of the difference between the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, see James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders," *International Organization*, 52.4 (1998): 943-969.

¹⁵ Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Martha Finnemore has similarly defined norms as "shared expectations about appropriate behaviour held by a community of actors." Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22.

context.¹⁶ Within the English School, solidarists in the tradition of John Vincent have explored how human rights might provide the basis for international society and a transition to world society. Nicholas Wheeler's work combines empirical with normative claims. He writes that there is an emerging humanitarian norm underlined by universalist cosmopolitan values, which creates an obligation for states to protect humans from the violence of their own governments. Wheeler traces the emergence of this norm through several Cold War and post-Cold War case studies, and concludes that a new norm of intervention has emerged in the post-Cold War period. His work does not stop with empirical analysis, in that he articulates a solidarist argument in favour of humanitarian intervention: "States that massively violate human rights should forfeit their right to be treated as legitimate sovereigns, thereby morally entitling other states to use force to stop the oppression."¹⁷

Other constructivist research has drawn attention to the role of non-state actors in the creation of norms. Keck and Sikkink have described how Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) have worked to influence state behaviour in various issue areas, including human rights, the environment and women's rights. By multiplying the channels of access to the international system, TANs are able to pressure states at the domestic and international levels to modify their practices.¹⁸ In another study, Finnemore has analysed the role of norm entrepreneurs in the emergence of humanitarian norms, to show how international organizations have played a role in teaching states what their interests are.

¹⁶ Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12-13.

¹⁸ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Her case study of Henri Dunant and the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross analyses how that organization was able to persuade states that it was in their interests to sign the First Geneva Convention.¹⁹ Along similar lines, Ann Marie Clark has shown how Amnesty International capitalized on the tension between human rights ideals and their incomplete realization to gain moral leverage and promote the further legalization of those norms.²⁰ Finally, Neta Crawford's theory of ethical argumentation shows how persuasive arguments, which depend on and refer to beliefs, can be used to change dominant practices. She applies this theory to her study of the anti-slavery movement, decolonization, and humanitarian intervention. The value of this contribution is that it describes now only how non-state actors can be agents of change in international politics, but she draws attention to argumentation as a mechanism of change.²¹

Perhaps the most similar approach to the one in this paper is that of Michael Barnett, who relates the emergence of a humanitarian norm to a transformation in the character of sovereignty.²² Rather than emphasizing how humanitarian norms have changed the behaviour of states, Barnett inverts this claim to show how "global politics [have] reshaped the nature of humanitarian action."²³ In this regard, Barnett's approach is more successful at relating humanitarian norms to the institution of sovereignty, but this analysis remains within a relatively narrow historical framework.

¹⁹ Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²¹ Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²² Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism with a Sovereign Face: UNHCR in the Global Undertow," *The International Migration Review*, Spring 2001: 244-277.

²³ Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism Transformed," *Perspectives on Politics*, December 2005, 3(4): 733.

Overall, this body of research has been successful to the extent that it has drawn attention to the recent emergence of a norm of humanitarian intervention in international politics. Its theoretical contributions include a greater understanding of the social nature of international relations, including the role of beliefs and norms, as well how non-state actors help change state practices. Nevertheless, since the historical scope of this research is so limited, it does not provide insight into the emergence of this norm in the context of long historical change. Most of the cases examined by these scholars occur within the past fifty years, under a fairly institutionalized regime of international humanitarian law. While it is necessary to understand contemporary humanitarian practices, looking at other historical cases might help us to understand the roots of current practices and beliefs. Also, it is not possible to appreciate the uniqueness and contingency of current beliefs about humanitarianism without discovering how they are different from what has occurred in the past. Looking at past practices, which occurred when international society was shaped differently, may help us to understand how changes in humanitarian norms can be linked to changes in the overall structure of the international system.

The beliefs underlying these practices, and the practices themselves, may differ greatly from those in our own context. Rather than exclude them from discussion because they do not fit contemporary understandings, it makes more sense to try to interpret them within their own contexts. In other words, the beliefs that constitute contemporary humanitarian practices have arisen out of a set of particular historical circumstances. In arguing for wider historical scope, I am not trying to impose a contemporary understanding of humanitarianism on past practices, which would be wrong-headed and ahistorical. Rather, my goal is to examine other historical circumstances, with the hopes of better

understanding the beliefs that constituted those practices in those times and places. This is with the hope that looking to the past helps us to understand how this present is, in the words of Jens Erik Bartelson, “logically possible.”²⁴ Furthermore, I am not arguing that the evolution of humanitarian norms is progressive, in the sense of getting closer to perfection. However, looking to the past may lead to a deeper understanding about how current practices have come into being.

While looking at other examples makes sense for historical reasons, it also makes sense for theoretical reasons. As Hedley Bull argued, the transnational solidarities displayed amongst the Protestants during the Wars of Religion indicated the presence of a strong element of international society.²⁵ The case of the Protestants will show how these transnational solidarities were enacted, and will thus provide insight into the nature of international society in 16th century Europe, a time when the concept of sovereignty had not yet been fully articulated. Achieving a greater understanding of early humanitarian practices may help to shed insight on a dimension of English School theory that has been little explored. As such, the next section of this paper will try to put these ideas into practice by looking to the case of Huguenot and Walloon refugees in England during the Wars of Religion in 16th and 17th century Europe.

Le Refuge

The word “refugee” was coined in reference to the thousands of French Protestant refugees who flocked to England in successive waves of immigration during the 16th and

²⁴ Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

²⁵ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1977), 41.

17th centuries. As historian Bernard Cottret points out, the French word *Refuge* refers to the Huguenot communities in exile.²⁶ Cottret notes that the word is misleading, in that “refuge” implies retreat or remoteness, but this overlooks the strategic role played by the Huguenots in the history of European Protestantism. For me, the word is also misleading, but in a different sense that that referred to by Cottret. The remoteness and passivity implied by *Refuge* omits the fact that the rescue of Protestant refugees played a central and strategic role in the formation of Elizabethan foreign policy. Elizabeth I’s perception of England as the protector of Protestantism led to both official and unofficial forms of assistance. Moreover, there was an active transnational network of Huguenots and sympathizers who worked hard to rescue their fellow Protestants from the persecutions of the French and Spanish crowns.

There were a couple waves of immigration that coincided with heightened levels of persecution on the Continent. The first wave of immigration started with the outbreak of the first War of Religion in France in 1562, continued with Spanish rule in the Netherlands under the Duke of Alva in 1567 and the St. Bartholomew massacre in 1572, and ended finally with Henry of Navarre’s Edict of Nantes in 1598. Estimates vary, but most historians agree that the total number of immigrants over this period was somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000.²⁷ Of this number, approximately 50,000 settled in England over the course of this period,²⁸ and 10,000 refugees had settled in the city of London by

²⁶ Cottret, 7.

²⁷ See Ole Peter Grell, *Calvinist Exiles in Tudor and Stuart England*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 4.

²⁸ Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 2.

the year 1590.²⁹ Unlike the wave of immigration that occurred a century later, most of the refugees were Walloons (French-speaking Dutch) or Dutch Calvinists. The second major wave of immigration, often called *le Grand Refuge*, occurred from 1680-1710, with around 200,000 mostly French Huguenot refugees over the span of thirty years. Starting in the 1660s, the French Crown gradually restricted Huguenot participation in French society, which culminated in the persecutions of the *dragonnades* and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685. As Bertrand van Ruymbeke observes, the short duration and large magnitude of the Second Refuge makes it “the third largest one-shot migration in early modern Europe after the expulsion of the Jews and the Moriscos from Spain in 1492 and 1609, respectively.”³⁰

My case study will focus on the first wave of immigration to England, during the reign of Elizabeth I from 1558-1603. This is due to limitations of space, but also because the First Refuge established stable networks that remained in place and played a crucial role in the migrations of the following century. Charles Littleton writes, “When the Huguenot refugees from Louis XIV’s France began to flood into London in the 1680s, they were greeted by a functioning and well-administered Reformed church which had not disappeared from sight during the years of sparse immigration in the mid-seventeenth century and which still played an important role for the increasingly anglicized descendants of the original immigrants.”³¹ In a certain sense, the First Refuge is more significant, because it represented the first time that England had to deal religious refugees

²⁹ Grell, 5.

³⁰ Bertrand van Ruymbeke, “Minority Survival: The Huguenot Paradigm in France and the Diaspora” in *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 6.

³¹ Charles Littleton, “Acculturation and the French Church of London, 1600-circa 1640” in *Memory and Identity*, 107.

on such a large scale, whereas the Second Refuge signified a continuation of practice that had been established in the previous century. Laura Hunt Yungblut observes that England has long been a refuge for people who have been forced to flee their home countries, but she points out that this tradition has its roots in the 16th century Protestant migration. She writes, “Those aliens who fled to England during the reign of Elizabeth I were, at least in any sizeable numbers, the first to have been motivated in their immigration by factors beyond what can be characterized as purely economic ones.”³² England was viewed as the bastion of Protestantism, and was thus the natural choice for these religious refugees.

Before looking to the case study itself, it is important to understand why it may be useful to look at the case of Protestant refugees in England under Elizabeth I. The case of Protestant refugees is notable in at least two aspects, both in its size and the nature of the migration. As already noted, the migration was virtually unprecedented in terms of the numbers of refugees it produced. This was one of the largest instances of immigration in Europe up until this point in history, and certainly the largest influx of migrants into England. Moreover, the causes of the migration were unique. Religious persecution in Europe was not a new phenomenon, as attested to by the experiences of Jews and Muslims in Spain, as well as the victims of the Inquisitions. But, as Aristide Zolberg observes, both of these communities were considered “outsiders,” insofar they were minority ethnic groups.³³ The Protestant persecutions were inflicted on a community that was culturally homogenous with the rest of the population, while religious difference was their only

³² Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us: Policies, perceptions and the presence of aliens in Elizabethan England*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

³³ For further discussion on the differences in treatment between Jews and Protestants, see Daniel Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen: The Controversy over Immigration and Population, 1660-1760*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 172-174.

distinguishing feature.³⁴ Daniel Statt points out, “[Religious] persecution following the Reformation and the clash of expanding nation-states added a new dimension to the potential for large-scale immigration.”³⁵ The persecution of the Protestants was notable, therefore, because it signaled one of the first major ideological clashes between indigenous Europeans.

Related to this, it is also important to note that England did not have a tradition of welcoming foreigners to its soil. Most foreigners were transients who crossed the Channel for economic reasons, and, if they stayed, were tolerated on the fringes of society. Up until the 16th century, strangers were treated with suspicion, and in some cases even violence. In the 12th century, Jews in York and London were the victims of a large-scale massacres, and Flemings and Lombards were targets of violence in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381.³⁶ In 1517, many English were suspicious of the economic prosperity of foreign merchants – one sermon claimed that aliens “eate the bread from the poore fatherles chyldren” - and a hostile environment ensued which culminated in the Evil May Day riots.³⁷ This is not to say that a sharp dichotomy of attitudes did not exist regarding the Protestant refugees; some tension did remain between the English and foreign populations. But as Andrew Pettegree notes, given the antipathy of the English towards foreigners, it is notable that by the middle of the 16th century, a large number of Dutch and French refugees did “come into their island,” and that they were, on the whole, much better received than one might

³⁴ Aristide Zolberg, “The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process,” *Annals*, May 1983: 33.

³⁵ Statt, 26.

³⁶ Robin Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 55.

³⁷ Hunt Yungblut, 73.

have expected.³⁸ While the obvious answer is that religious identification with the refugees created a sense of sympathy, it remains that the practice of welcoming refugees was unprecedented. One must also remember that, despite their religious affinities, the French and Dutch refugees were distinguished from the English population by cultural and language differences. They may have been Protestant, but they were still foreign. The question arises of what factors were present that contributed to this change in practice? Thus, this case is worth investigation because it not only signaled the emergence of a new norm of welcoming refugees, but it created a precedent which would be followed in the centuries to come.

Another reason why the case of Protestant persecution is worth investigation is because it was also so closely linked to the consolidation of absolutist power. The modern state system emerged out of the conflicts over religion, so the Protestant refugees from the Continent can be viewed as the first victims of the new Westphalian order. As Aristide Zolberg writes, “The case may thus be viewed as a particular instance of a more general situation, involving a clash between a state-building project founded on the pursuit of ideological homogeneity – here indicated by public adherence to the official religion – and a state of affairs that had recently come to be marked by considerable diversity of opinion on the matter.”³⁹ The birth of the modern state system and the principle of sovereignty are usually – and somewhat simplistically – dated to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. However, the Treaty signaled the end of a series of major religious wars in Europe that had started in the previous century. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg between the Holy Roman Empire and France was the first to institute the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. This

³⁸ Pettegree, 2.

³⁹ Zolberg, 33.

gave the leaders of Germanic states the authority to choose between Catholicism and Lutheranism – but it did not extend protection to Anabaptists or Calvinists. As for France, Nancy Lyman Roelker writes that the principle *un roi, une foi* signified an indissoluble bond between the two: “France equals the law, plus the king, plus the faith, as ordained by God and sanctioned by custom and history.”⁴⁰ More simply, being French meant being Catholic. As the states of Europe tried to consolidate their power, by forcing populations to follow the religion of the Prince, this led to the massive scale of persecution and migration described above.⁴¹ In other words, the persecution of Protestants ran parallel to the emergence of sovereignty as the organizing principle of the international system. It makes sense, therefore, to examine this case since it plays a hidden role in the story of the constitution of our modern international order, particularly the defining principle of sovereignty.

Now that I have made a case for why the example of 16th century Protestant refugees is worth investigation, I will now go on to discuss their reception in England. There were two aspects of this: the official policy of the English Crown towards them and the support given to them by individual and groups.

Elizabeth I came to power at a precarious time for the British throne, and her attempts to aid the Protestant refugees must be interpreted within the unstable domestic and international contexts of the time. Domestically, the Marian rule had left England

⁴⁰ Nancy Lyman Roelker, “The Two Faces of Rome: The Fate of Protestantism in France” in *Politics, Religion and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of De Lamar Jensen* (Volume XXVII, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 1994), 106.

⁴¹ For a similar analysis, see Statt, 26: “The religious dissection of Europe in the sixteenth century, however, joined with the expanding powers – military and fiscal – of the dynastic nation-states to greatly increase the compass and the devastation of religious persecution. Wars and persecutions, pursued with zealous rivalry by Protestants and Catholics alike, uprooted large numbers of people and drove many into exile.”

divided along Catholic and Protestant lines. As soon as Elizabeth came to power, it was clear that she would attempt to unite the country under the Protestant Church. The first session of Parliament in 1559 passed a number of bills that established the supremacy of Protestant forms of worship.⁴² At the same time, the country was threatened by the powerful Catholic powers on the Continent, Spain under Philip II and France under Henry II. During Elizabeth's rule, England's traditional enemy France was divided by internal conflict, while Spain threatened to dominate Western Europe.⁴³ Thus, Elizabeth was faced with the task of unifying her own country, while balancing the threats from across the Channel.

Traditionally historians have viewed Elizabeth's foreign policy as being motivated primarily by considerations of security and defense, while religion was only peripherally important.⁴⁴ However, many historians now agree that this view is incomplete and now agree that religion played a complex and central role in the formation of Elizabethan foreign policy. Simon Adams argues that Elizabeth's foreign policy was associated with an ideology of "political Puritanism," which he defines as "the advocacy of assistance to the Church abroad, rather than rapprochement with the Catholic power or Realpolitik."⁴⁵

⁴² For discussion on the details of these bills' passage, see Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion, 1558-1603*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 10-13.

⁴³ See Hunt Yungblut, 82-85; R.B. Wernham, *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558-1603*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 23-27.

⁴⁴ For some typical examples of this view, see E.I. Kouri, "For True Faith or National Interest? Queen Elizabeth I and the Protestant Powers" in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1987), 411-436; R.B. Wernham, *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558-1603*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

⁴⁵ Simon Adams, *The Protestant Cause: Religious Alliance with the West European Calvinist Communities as a Political Issue in England, 1585-1630*, D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1973.

More recently, Susan Doran has argued that it is impossible to separate Elizabeth's political and religious interests. While Elizabeth was not interested in assisting rebels against their legitimate sovereigns, she did use all the diplomatic and informal means at her disposal to assist them, and portrayed herself abroad as the protector of Protestants.⁴⁶ David Trim gives the most extreme version of this argument, when he writes that Elizabeth's foreign policy was "confessionally driven" by a "Protestant programme of action." He argues that when "True Faith" and "National Interest" did conflict, "the confessional, rather than the national, interest consistently took precedence for Elizabeth and her ministers."⁴⁷ The common strand through all these arguments is that they reveal a false dichotomy between national interest and religious commitment. By emphasizing the central role played by religion, these historians are not saying that religion trumped political interests, but rather that Elizabeth's religious beliefs and values were constitutive of her foreign policy. In the examples that follow, I will show how Elizabeth's religious identity led to a policy of protection for persecuted Protestants.

The first test of Elizabeth's foreign policy in regards to the persecution of French Protestants came in 1562. France was on the brink of civil war between its Catholic majority and Calvinist minority, and in March the Duke of Guise participated in the massacre of a Protestant congregation at Vassy. A number of Huguenot insurrections

⁴⁶ See Susan Doran, *England and Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999), 9-10, 97-101; Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 64-66. Doran has also written more generally the relationship between religion and Elizabeth's domestic and foreign policies. See *op.cit.* Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion, 1558-1603*; Susan Doran, "Elizabeth I's Religion: The Evidence of Her Letters," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51(4), October 2000: 699-720.

⁴⁷ David J.B. Trim, "Seeking a Protestant Alliance and Liberty of Conscience on the Continent, 1558-85" in *Tudor England and its Neighbours*, Susan Doran and Glenn Richardson, Eds. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005), 139, 143.

occurred throughout the country, and the following month the Protestant princes of Condé requested assistance from England. At first, Elizabeth resisted sending direct military aid and offered to mediate instead. By September, however, she agreed in the Treaty of Hampton Court to send an envoy to France “to protest at the persecution of ‘those who profess the same cause’ and to announce her intentions ‘to act for their preservation.’”⁴⁸ Susan Doran notes that there was also a convergence of religious with other political interests, in that, while Elizabeth was motivated by her sympathies for the Protestant cause, she also viewed this as an opportunity to recover Calais. In the end, the intervention was an unmitigated disaster, exacerbated by Elizabeth’s stubborn refusal to surrender, even after the fall of Condé.

The humiliation of the defeat made Elizabeth much more cautious about sending direct military assistance to Protestants abroad. Trim argues that, rather than interpreting this as a sign of lack of support for the Protestants, it was Elizabeth’s realization of England’s military weakness that necessitated the change in policy.⁴⁹ On top of this, she was reluctant to give open military support to “proceedings of subjects against their rulers.”⁵⁰ As a result, she did not send military aid to support the Protestant cause, even after the St. Bartholomew Day massacre in 1572 and the siege of the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle in 1573. Despite this, a number of Elizabeth’s closest advisors advocated for a foreign policy that more actively supported Protestantism abroad. For instance, Elizabeth’s secretary Dr. Thomas Wilson advised that English policy whereby “those abroad who are faithful, and of the same religion that we professe, might be united to us,

⁴⁸ Quoted in Doran, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy*, 21.

⁴⁹ Trim, 153-154.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Doran, *England and Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 100.

and we to them.”⁵¹ It wasn’t until England went to war against Spain in 1585 that she gave direct military aid to the Protestants in both the Netherlands and France, but this was part of the larger effort to defeat Spain.

In spite of Elizabeth’s reluctance to give direct military support to the Protestants in the Netherlands and France, she employed a number of diplomatic and unofficial means of support for the “secret war” against European Catholicism.⁵² Both in 1567 and in 1573, she offered to mediate between the Catholic and Huguenot princes, with the aim of securing a degree of toleration of Protestant religious practices. After 1577, she exerted diplomatic pressure on Philip II of Spain to suspend the Inquisition and allow freedom of conscience.⁵³ In addition, throughout the 1570s, she covertly financed the armies of the prince of Condé, the Palatine reformer John Casimir, and William of Orange.⁵⁴ Later in 1593 when Henry IV (previously known as her ally Henry of Navarre) converted to Catholicism, Elizabeth sent Sir Robert Sidney to France to remind Henry of the support she had previously lent him: “[He] hath often tasted of the good of such her succors.” She also made it clear in the message that she would assist the Huguenots directly if necessary.⁵⁵ Aside from diplomatic and financial support, Elizabeth’s support for the Protestants can be demonstrated by the fact that England openly provided asylum for the tens of thousands of religious refugees who arrived in England during her reign. As Robin Gwynn observes, “[Her] favourable reception of Huguenot refugees was a more effective statement, falling short of direct intervention in France on behalf of the Protestant

⁵¹ Qtd. In Doran, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy*, 97

⁵² See David Trim, “The ‘Secret War’ of Elizabeth I: England and the Huguenots during the early Wars of Religion, 1562-77,” *HSP*, XXVII:2 (1999).

⁵³ Doran, *England and Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 99.

⁵⁴ Trim, 161-162.

⁵⁵ Adams, 130-131.

cause...but making her position plain.”⁵⁶ Her tacit support was also evident when she turned a blind eye as the foreigners’ churches in England started recruiting volunteers to fight against Catholics abroad.⁵⁷

The story of the Protestant refugees would be incomplete without some discussion of the role played by individuals and groups, and it is to this that I will now turn. The first stream of mostly Dutch refugees arrived in England in the latter half of the 1540s, and by 1549 there was a congregation of Dutch Protestants in London who met regularly for worship. From the beginning, there were close connections between the English government and leaders in the foreign Protestant community. In 1550, the French and Dutch churches were officially founded under a mutual superindendent, Johannes a Lasco, a Polish reformer and refugee who had connections at Court, most notably with Elizabeth I’s future minister, William Cecil. The church was also supported by leading figures within the Church of England, such as Bishop John Hooper and Archbishop Cranmer, who viewed their support of the foreigners’ church as a way to further the English Reformation, as well as prevent the spread of Anabaptism.⁵⁸ After the death of Edward VI and the ascension of the Catholic Queen Mary, many Protestants had to seek refuge on the Continent, where they stayed until Elizabeth I’s rise to the throne in 1558.

Shortly after the first session of Parliament in 1559 restored Protestantism as the main religion of England, Jan Utenhove, a Dutch Protestant recently returned from the Marian exile, petitioned the Crown to re-establish the foreign churches. Later, he also acted as an unofficial ambassador between the government and Countess of East Friesland in

⁵⁶ Gwynn, 65.

⁵⁷ Doran, *England and Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 100.

⁵⁸ Grell, 1, 34.

Germany, as well helped to solve a trade dispute between England and the Netherlands in 1564. In 1560, the foreigners' church was re-opened under the leadership of a pastor from Geneva, Nicolas des Gallars.⁵⁹ Like many of the ministers who would follow his short tenure in London, des Gallars also played an important role as liaison between the church and the English government. In 1562, when Elizabeth considering sending military support to the Huguenot Prince of Condé, des Gallars was privy to the discussion. Nicolas Throckmorton, the English ambassador in Paris, recommended that des Gallars be kept fully briefed "as one in great credit with the Prince [Condé] and such as profess the religion," so as to ensure the good faith of the negotiations.⁶⁰ Similarly, after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, French ministers were frequently summoned to Court to confer with government officials about a possible intervention.⁶¹

The above examples demonstrate that the Huguenot churches not only provided a community for the Protestant refugees, but they also were in a position to influence the policies of the Elizabethan government. In modern terminology, the churches acted as a "pressure group" on the Crown to persuade it to intervene on behalf of persecuted Protestants. Even though England did not supply direct military assistance in many instances, the French ministers were certainly in a good position to persuade Elizabeth to provide more informal forms of assistance. At any rate, the willingness of the English government to receive direct input from the Protestant churches is an indication of their sympathy to the cause.

⁵⁹ Cottret, 46-47.

⁶⁰ Pettegree, 265.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 266.

As for the church communities themselves, they provided a huge source of comfort and security for the refugees. With the flood of refugees that arrived after each renewal of intense persecution, during the first War of Religion and after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, "a heroic effort was required to maintain the social provision of the community at an adequate level."⁶² The leaders of the churches charged themselves with caring for the community's poor, and when the plague epidemic swept across Europe in 1563, they hired a surgeon to take care of victims in the refugee community.⁶³ Not only did they provide a religious haven for the French and the Dutch refugees, but they were also a source of support for their co-religionists on the continent. The church members maintained their ties to family and friends on the continent, and sent support whenever possible. Church communities in Sandwich, London and Norwich helped to organize and finance activities in Flanders during the Revolt of the Netherlands.⁶⁴ In 1568 and 1570, the London churches sent financial support, arms and volunteers to aid the campaigns of William of Orange.⁶⁵ While these are only a couple of small examples, they provide some indication of the presence of a well-established network, which acted as a conduit of assistance for the Protestants on the Continent as well as in the Refuge.

Humanitarianism, Sovereignty, and Power

The case of Protestant refugees during the 16th century contains many of the ingredients of what we would now label a "humanitarian crisis." The Catholic rulers of France and Spain targeted a specific group of people, with the goal of removing them from

⁶² Pettegree, 206. See also 210-211.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 206-207.

⁶⁴ Gwynn, 65.

⁶⁵ Pettegree, 253-254; Gwynn, 65.

their property or killing them. As a result, there were thousands of deaths at the hands of the armies of the Catholic monarchs, and even greater numbers of displaced people seeking refuge. As the beacon of Protestantism in Europe, many of the refugees turned to England for safety, while the English government also had legitimate interests in supporting the Protestant cause. As a result, England not only provided a haven for the refugees, but also was able to muster the political will to intervene directly and indirectly on behalf of the Dutch Protestants and the Huguenots. Additionally, there were extensive networks of individuals and churches that mobilized to bring awareness about the crisis to their host government and community. These networks also sent support to the Continent in the form of money, arms, or volunteers, as well as provided a security net for the refugee communities in England. Many aspects of the case - the massacres, the government-sponsored violence, and the refugees – are not dissimilar from the humanitarian crises, and responses to them, that occur in modern times.

There is, however, some limit to the comparison. I am not about to pull a metaphorical bunny out a hat by arguing that Elizabeth's response to the Protestant refugees was "humanitarian" in the same way in which we understand the term today. Absolutist Europe has little in common with today's modern, liberal, democratic state, while contemporary notions of humanitarianism are located within the framework of international humanitarian law and human rights discourse. Obviously, it would be deeply problematic to examine the case of the Huguenots in these terms. Nevertheless, I think it is useful to look at the response to the Protestant refugees – both the similarities and the differences – to understand how the beliefs that underline humanitarian practices are historically contingent on notions of identity. While the practices themselves may look

similar to those of today, the beliefs that underline those moral obligations are different, and thus lead to different possibilities for humanitarian action. Examining practices of moral obligation provides a window into how constructions of identity serve to legitimate the boundaries and interactions between Self and Other. More importantly, the enactment of moral obligations provides clues about how the practice of sovereignty simultaneously excludes and includes various groups. While moral obligations are certainly not the sole determinant of state identity, they do contribute in some part to the delineation of the boundaries of political communities.

As such, the case of the Protestant refugees outlined above illustrates the possibilities and limitations for “humanitarian” action in the 16th century. As discussed above, the Huguenots and Dutch Protestants were the first victims of the newly emerging Westphalian order, at the core of which was religious identity. Each sovereign had the power to choose the religion of the state without external interference. The Protestant refugees were produced through the process of negotiating this emerging basis for sovereign authority. For England, its identity as a Protestant state was inseparable from its legitimacy as a sovereign authority. England viewed itself as the bastion of Protestantism in Europe, so it perceived a moral obligation to assist the persecuted Protestants on the Continent.

It is also important to note that England’s perception of its own identity as a Protestant power also defined the limits of its moral obligations. After all, it provided no similar refuge for Jews or Muslims, and, during the Protestant migration, even refused to allow members of certain Protestant sects, such as Anabaptists.⁶⁶ This provides some

⁶⁶ Grell, *op.cit.*

indication of how identity sets the limits on humanitarian action, in that, only a certain defined community was perceived as deserving of assistance. It may be objected that this case does not contain a true example of humanitarianism, on the basis of such a limited scope of application. However, I would argue that this objection comes from a contemporary universalist understanding of humanitarianism, which would be inappropriate to apply to this case. While it is true that England displayed only a very limited notion of who deserved assistance, this nevertheless provides an empirical indication of its own understanding of its moral obligations towards threatened populations. It is also reflective of the fact that the international society of absolutist Europe was limited to Western Christendom, and that such moral obligations extended no further than its borders.⁶⁷ In short, England's practice of providing refuge to Protestant refugees contributed to its identity as a Protestant state, thereby defining who it considered "inside" the state, and who remained "outside." In other words, England's enactment of its moral obligations to foreign Protestants was an integral component of its assertion of its religious sovereignty, and the demarcation of its borders. While it may seem counterintuitive, moral obligation served at the time to transcend old cultural boundaries at the same time as establishing new political borders.

It is necessary to respond to the objection that England's motives in providing refuge for the Protestants were not merely altruistic. Spain and France posed significant threats to the security of the Continent and to England, so it may be argued that England's actions were intended to balance this threat and were thus purely self-interested. The problem with this explanation is that it assumes that England's national interests and its

⁶⁷ See Bull, 27-33.

moral obligations were mutually exclusive. It is easy to fall into this polarizing trap: was England's effort to aid Protestant refugees the result of security interests or was it motivated by genuine concern? One possible answer to this objection is that England could have supported the anti-Catholic fight on the Continent while refusing to welcome the thousands of refugees to its shores. The fact that it not only supported the Protestant military efforts, but also provided a haven for the refugees, indicates a deeper sense of moral obligation to the Protestants. More fundamentally, I also echo David Trim here when I argue that the dichotomy between national interest and moral obligation is false.⁶⁸ England's sense of moral obligation to the refugees arose from its perceptions of its own identity as the protector of Protestantism, and these beliefs then constituted its interest in aiding the Protestants. It is impossible to understand the power dynamics of 16th century Europe without reference to the religious identities of these states. In this light, England's aid to the Protestants did not merely balance a foreign threat, but rather, the meaning of its actions were constituted by the way in which it perceived its moral obligations as a Protestant state.

The objection above, nevertheless, does highlight the connection between national interest and moral obligation. The humanitarian failures of the 1990s – the obvious examples are Rwanda and Yugoslavia - were often the result of lack of political will, because states perceived that they had no immediate political interests in risking their own soldiers for a humanitarian cause. In other words, just because a state perceives a moral obligation does not mean that the moral obligation will be acted upon. In the case of England in the 16th century, there was a convergence between moral obligation, national

⁶⁸ Trim, *op. cit.*

interest, and political will. In many other cases, humanitarian crises have escalated when states have perceived no match between obligation and interest, or they have not been able to muster the will to intervene even if the former two do converge.

This is also related to the relationship between power and humanitarian action. Typically, humanitarianism is assumed to be politically disinterested, which leads to the incorrect assumption that it is also divorced from considerations of power. England's provision of assistance to the Protestants was demonstration of its power, whereby it attempted to help a weaker party. This can be understood in material terms – England sent money and military aid to the Protestants. But England's actions can also be interpreted in more ideological terms. Raymond Duvall and Michael Barnett's discussion of productive power is helpful here, which has to do with how identities and meanings are constituted through social processes. They write:

Productive power...is the constitution of all social subjects with various social powers through systems of knowledge and discursive practices of broad and general social scope. Conceptually, the move is away from structures, per se, to systems of signification and meaning...and to networks of social forces perpetually shaping one another.⁶⁹

England's assistance to the refugees was unmistakably ideological, in that, it was part of the attempt to bolster Protestantism in Europe. Moreover, these activities reproduced a particular understanding of what constituted acceptable religious practice, and who was deserving of assistance. In other words, these practices reinforced certain identities and activities as legitimate. This notion of productive power does not reduce England's belief in its moral obligations to persecuted Protestants, but it shows how humanitarianism

⁶⁹ Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, eds., *Power in Global Governance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

practices are themselves implicated in relations of power. The process is comparable to Michael Barnett's description of how contemporary notions of humanitarianism have played a role in producing and reproducing liberal hegemony.⁷⁰ Thus, one possible avenue for future research is to examine how humanitarian practices in various historical contexts have reflected, perpetuated or transformed various relations of power.

This paper opened by arguing that contemporary understandings of humanitarianism are historically and theoretically narrow. Opening up practices of moral obligation to wider historical examination helps to show how the beliefs that underline these practices shift and give different meaning to these practices. Additionally, I have also tried to show relationships of moral obligation give rise to different understandings of sovereignty and state identity. The beliefs that render a set of moral obligations to be legitimate also help to delineate the boundaries of political community. This has been demonstrated through a historical case study of Protestant refugees in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. England's response to this crisis arose from the way in which its moral obligations stemmed from its identity as the bastion of European Protestantism, which in turn constituted its foreign interests. Furthermore, its Protestant identity also defined the limits of its humanitarianism. The paper has also alluded to the ways in which 16th century humanitarian practices reflected membership in international society, as well as ran parallel to emergence of sovereignty. I have tried to show that humanitarian practices are historically contingent upon notions of identity, as well as how they implicated in relations of power. Finally, the paper opens up the way to further research on

⁷⁰ Barnett, *op. cit.*

humanitarian practices, which will help to uncover the beliefs that underline various perceptions of moral obligation in different places and times.

The implications of some of these conclusions may seem somewhat pessimistic, particularly the argument that humanitarian action will only occur with the convergence of moral obligation, interest, and political will. In other words, there is no such thing as humanitarianism done for its own sake. I will, however, make the observation that the case of the 16th century Protestant refugees highlights the ways in which practices themselves are transformative. Over the past four hundred years, as international society has expanded from Western Europe to a global scale, the beliefs that underlie humanitarian practices have become increasingly universal. Therein lies some small degree of hope that humanitarian practices have the potential to challenge established notions of identity, and relations between strong and weak.

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