

Globalization, International Intervention and the Assignment of Blame

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Abstract Critical theorists dwell on the pressing issue of how states and multilateral organizations actually become agents who assign moral responsibilities among themselves. A promising, yet insufficient approach to the issue considers that these collective agents are constituted inside ethical practices of responsibilities dominated by a power inequality amongst them. I argue that such approach fails to consider the extent to which the dynamic interaction of old and new political actors in a globalized context affects these practices and allows for inclusiveness and fluidity in the allocation of blame. The argument is pursued by analyzing the forms by which this dynamic interaction has been affecting the narrative and practice of UN interventions, particularly in Iraq and Kosovo.

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Moral responsibility has emerged as an object of concern, both in political discourses and academic analysis of international relations. In view of the number of UN missions currently in place around the globe, amounting to 15 only in terms of peacekeeping operations, and the budget they consume, there is increasing interest in grasping the responsibilities that states-or the community of states- should have in post-conflict situations. Critical theory offers promising insights into the issue because it focuses on how individuals or collectivities become moral agencies who create and assign responsibilities to each other. According to Frost (Frost 2003, 2009) and Linklater (Linklater 2007, 2009), states are potentially endowed with ethical reasoning but develop it in interactions with one another in a situated context. It is within ethical practices that they constitute themselves as agents who are to be assigned blame or not. Connolly (Connolly 1991, 1995) and Hoover (Hoover 2012) further claim that states' interactions inside a given practice of moral responsibility are shaped by differences in the states' ability to exercise power. Following their

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reasoning, international intervention under the United Nations (UN) framework would generally be carried out in view of a constructed consensus among state members on the value of universal human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security. But such consensus is in fact largely controlled by powerful states intending to advance their strategic interests.

The critical approaches mentioned above ultimately aim at exposing the biased dynamics shaping states' practices of moral assignment, which back *a status quo* and arguing for open channels of political contestation and public accountability in international relations. However, their claims lack effectiveness. They wrongly assume that a liberally normative narrative is still quite homogeneous, and powerful states are still legitimately able to justify their interests and interventionist actions on the basis of this narrative. They abstract themselves from the globally historical dynamics in which states' ethical practices are actually taking place and being challenged by.

I claim that the emergence of new centers of authority and forms of interaction among these centers in view of solving global problems more vividly exposes the internal incoherence of given practices of moral responsibility among states. More precisely, states are no longer able to firmly establish amongst themselves the practice of international intervention under the UN framework, creating cohesive narratives and promoting encompassing initiatives on the ground. New political actors have a greater ability to claim their voices, actively influencing decision-making processes and bringing fluidity to the assignment of blame in international relations. Moral responsibility becomes less based on states' traditional and power-based construction of distinctions between fit and unfit sovereign collective entities, and become more dependent on the ability of various centers of authority to respond to the pressing problems observed in a particular socio-political context.

I pursue my argument by first analyzing recent changes in the UN normative framework of international intervention. The newest doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2) sustains that sovereignty is no longer based on entitlement but on a state's ability to respond to its citizens' basic needs or demands. Although this enlightened global attempt to protect civilians in face of mass atrocities must be praised, it engenders normative inconsistencies. It turns state sovereignty, the founding pillar of the international community of states, into a questionable concept. Can the state still be perceived as the adequate collective agency to respond to citizens' needs and demands? Are not other collective agencies, such as NGOs or corporations, already performing some state functions, and therefore assuming responsibilities traditionally attributed to the political community within a global environment?

At the narrative level, the UN continues to reaffirm that states are still the primary collective agency of international relations as they can consistently act impartially, guaranteeing the rule of law and the respect for basic human rights principles for their citizens. Whenever a nation faces a situation of fragility, the community of states under the UN umbrella represents the fittest political actor to guide this country in fulfilling its autonomous capacity. However, interventionist initiatives promoted under these arguments lack sound justification as they are unsustainable in practice. There

is a growing gap between the UN normative discourse and state members' actions inside the practice of international intervention, as the UN missions in Kosovo and Iraq prove. The UN expands intrusive practices, overlooking the defense of a liberal framework in favor of the need to show results. At the same time, other actors, such as regional associations, local political elites, groups of civil society and media broadcasting companies not only provide critical inputs but also contribute in formal and informal ways to the formulation and implementation of public initiatives in these countries. Some of these actors are so actively involved in the decision-making process that they become responsible for the provision of minimum state functions. The practice of state-building in these countries gradually becomes a multi-level and context-dependent affair.

The first session analyses the main premises of a critical perspective, emphasizing states' diverse abilities to bear and assign moral responsibilities. The second one addresses the pitfalls of a critical perspective, mainly related to its limitations in exposing the faulty lines of a liberal practice of responsibility among states while proposing credible mechanisms for its contestation in a global context. The third part specifically examines changes in the normative discourse of international intervention in recent years. The fourth session illustrates inconsistencies between this normative discourse and UN interventionist initiatives in Kosovo and Iraq. Furthermore, it discusses the extent to which these inconsistencies do in fact express a diffusion of power and fluidity in the assignment of blame among political actors participating in the practice of international intervention.

A critical perspective on agency and the assignment of moral responsibilities

Contemporary authors such as Linklater (Linklater 2009, pp. 15-30), Charvet & Kaczynska-Nay (Charvet & Kaczynska-Nay 2008, pp. 352-353) and Frost (Frost 2009, p. 20) argue that moral agency is formed through historically situated ethical interactions. Who the agent is, and how he acts or should act will greatly depend on the sort of interactions he establishes with other participants inside a given ethical practice. By developing mutual kinds of attitudes towards each other, they come to recognize themselves as valid interlocutors and define criteria that will establish the appropriateness or inappropriateness of an action. Responsibilities will then be assigned on the basis of the interpretation of these criteria.

It is particularly Frost who is concerned with the formation of the moral agency through ethical practices taking place in world politics today. In his view, international relations are always ethically informed, while states' foreign policy strategies and actions are framed by ethical judgments and suffer from ethical constraints imposed by the framework of international laws and conventions. For example, as part of the war on terrorism after the 9/11 attacks, Bush formed a multinational force with the support of 8 states, the Coalition of the Willing, to invade Iraq. The invasion was mainly justified in terms of avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe. Nevertheless, it was harshly criticized due to the fact that it was initially pursued without the backing of the UN Security Council's

resolutions, undermining not only international law but also UN authority.¹

According to Frost, there is a clear need to critically analyze the particular capabilities of the agents involved in this kind of ethical practice as well as their collective ability to influence the assignment of moral responsibilities *vis-à-vis* each other. Failure to pursue this kind of analysis may tacitly reinforce a *status quo* without any proper scrutiny, which would render these moral assignments not only less legitimate but also unrealistic as they do not consider the agents' limitations.

From the above critical perspective, it is reasonable to assume that states are still the main participants of ethical practices inside which basic requirements for morally appropriate actions in international relations are defined today. To proceed with this assumption, however, we must admit that ethical reasoning can be extended from the individual, the moral unit *par excellence*, to the state as a specific collectivity. Erskine (Erskine 2003, p. 21) plays an important part in the development of this potential link. From his perspective, the state is structurally organized and possesses a singular identity, considering that a distinctly politico-cultural identity among citizens is born from their involvement in the process of public reasoning. It also enjoys a certain degree of autonomy due to its ability to define and pursue common actions based on the broader interests of its citizens'. Besides this, the state can understand the consequences of its actions and recognize that other collectivities have similar capacities of action and understanding.

For the purpose of my argument, another point of comparison between the individual and the state can be added. States can also recognize each other as valid interlocutors and set ethical standards not only to frame their actions but also to have them appraised by all. The states recognize each other as sovereign entities abiding by the most basic principles of self-determination and non-intervention. Their actions have to be justified by the mutually accepted interpretation of this kind of ethical criteria which are codified in multilateral declarations, treaties, covenants, and doctrines.

There are, nonetheless, limits for attributing moral capacities to states. The state lacks external conditions that impinge on individuals' exercise of ethical reasoning. In the international environment, no sovereign political authority can both secure an enduring level of fairness in the interpretation of these standards and enforce multilateral commitments through the monopolistic use of force. Multilateral agreements are ultimately subjected to the discretionary power of governments and easily neglected without those governments suffering any severe punishment. The invasion of Iraq by the Coalition of the Willing in 2003 without the backing of the UN further illustrates this point.

Surely, the lack of a final authority capable of imposing enforceable procedures to secure fairness renders states' interactions much more dependent on power politics than interactions established among citizens within a nation-state. But that does not necessarily undermine the willingness and ability of the state to establish ethical practices in its international relations. States are still interested in establishing well-defined criteria to regulate their behavior, on the basis of ethically coherent arguments

¹ See Frost 2009, p. 41.

and congruence between those arguments and the actions to be taken. As Frost (Frost 2009, p. 28) emphasizes, ethical constraints should not be seen as antipathetic to power pursuit. In fact, they exist to limit them to a justifiable degree for the participants.

Connolly (1991, 1995), and more recently Hoover (2012, 2014), further develop the link between power politics and ethical practices. They offer two fundamental insights into the discussion. First, the exercise of power is, in fact, intrinsic to ethical practices. Second, the morally responsible agent necessarily has a political identity constructed inside practices dominated by the parties' exercise of unequal power. According to Hoover: "*the responsible agent is a socially constructed agent and the act of holding responsible is a coercive and creative act.*" (Hoover 2012, p. 236) In these terms, the responsible agent only exists inter-subjectively within a historically situated context. In this context, someone is held responsible not merely on the basis of the successful use of force, economic sanctions or political leverage. He is also held responsible through persuasion, the use of co-optation strategies and the creation of narratives, which project a determined image of the relationship between oneself and the other.

Hoover's reasoning is of particular relevance to the analysis of inter-states' relations. In world politics, some states tend to enjoy a greater power advantage than others, which lack enabling conditions to act with full independence. The latter can lack internal means or depend on foreign aid and expertise in order to exercise basic state capacities. These states are affected by, for instance, corrupted governments, weak education systems and underdeveloped infrastructure. They are popularly labeled in the academic literature as quasi-states or deficient states, terms coined by Jackson and Rawls, respectively.² In the language of multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), they are commonly referred to as fragile, weak or failed states, depending on their level of disorganization as sovereign political units.

The use of the above terms and labels in academic and international organizations' circles are revealing of the narrative, which is being constructed and eventually backs the actions of the community of states or those of individual states. Autonomous agents that are fully able to think about, act and abide by ethical principles assist the agent that is temporarily lacking the conditions to think and act ethically. The morally fit agent lends a helping hand to the one that is morally unfit, thus allowing it to fully re-establish its autonomy.

Here, the definition of moral fitness is itself dependent on how the more powerful state members inside the international organization, such as liberal states responsible for the establishment of a UN system after the Second World War and singularly represented at the Security Council, are able to influence the portrait of the less powerful ones, making reference to the ill character of their political and economic systems. This definition is also dependent on how these powerful member states are able to legitimize this portrait by leading the organization to objectify their

² See Robert Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

interpretation of how countries should be assisted, using either qualifying terms such as good governance or quantifying socio-economic achievements. When successful, the institutionalization of the portrait represents the validation of the powerful members' viewpoint through the controlling process of construction and devaluation of the interlocutor (Hoover 2012, p. 251).

The aforementioned portrait tends to represent a clear-cut view of the reality, an idealized interpretation of the actual dynamics of states' interactions. States facing situations of fragility are described as potentially valid interlocutors who must overcome their bad luck, bad management of resources or lack of these. The existence of "fragility" here is rarely seen as a consequence of a wider dynamics that all states help to construct. The portrait's presentation in these terms provides the powerful actors with substantial leverage in the definition of what should be the moral responsibilities that he or the other should bear.

Obviously, it would be simplistic to assume that powerful states are driven by their narrow interests and not by broader ethical concerns when helping to construct a framework for moral assignments, such as the UN framework for international intervention. It would also be faulty to assume that they are fully responsible for shaping the ethical criteria by use of their ample politico-economic resources. In the search for inter-subjective ethical approval, powerful states are obliged to make concessions to construct criteria that can be valid for all, including themselves. To be perceived as legitimate, the agent in a powerful position needs not only to construct a narrative that underlines an ideal dichotomy but also to envisage and implement strategies of action for itself and the other, which minimally respect and sustain this narrative.

A powerful agent has to convince others that the arguments he or she helps to shape can be backed by real actions. As a politicized exercise, this process of convincing involves initiatives which aim to control both the way the other's autonomy is constructed (good governance, rule of law, democratic procedures) and the kind of contestation mechanisms (accountability procedures) that the other has access to. Furthermore, this kind of exercise should be finely tuned: the other should not be straightly forced to accept the terms of the exercise, but partly willing to participate in it. Also, the self should be seen as mostly keen to abide by the same standards it helps to shape. The more powerful the actors, the more obliged they are to play politics in a nuanced way if they wish to gain legitimacy for their actions. Their inability to fine-tune their behavior can render their initiatives not only illegitimate but also politically unsustainable.

A critical approach exposes the influence of power politics in the making of the above narratives and institutional frameworks that assign moral responsibilities to agents in international relations. More importantly, it reveals how actors are constituted in their capacities to assign blame when taking part in these ethical practices. Through this exposition, the agents are able to construct an informed view of the process and empower themselves. Moreover, new mechanisms for realizing plurality can be contemplated and put into place, namely, mechanisms which increase the participation of diverse voices in the process of assigning blame in view of offering new inputs to it (Hoover 2012, p. 50).

The global challenges facing a critical perspective on moral responsibility

There are limits to the above understanding of ethical practices of responsibility. The acceptance of individuals' engagement in the historical construction of moral agency tends to undermine the possibility of a critical moral viewpoint from which convention is challenged. It is far from obvious how we can or should proceed to make the process of assigning blame more open and critically informative if we are ourselves part of *a status quo*'s dynamics. In Hoover's recent works, this question remains unanswered (Hoover 2014).

One promising way of looking at the problem is suggested by Frost when discussing dispersed practices of responsibility, but it is hardly explored (Frost 2004, p. 88). In his view, real criticism – and therefore the possibility of change – will be more likely to come from 1) comparative ethics, showing how the ethics inherent to one practice differ from those of another: 2) exhibiting to the participants an internal incoherence with the practice. The first clearly suffers from shortcomings: the results of comparative ethics are most meaningful when we can compare homogenous kinds of practices, though in an increasingly globalized world these are scarce. The second option is, however, open for exploration.

Let us assume that internal incoherence inside ethical practices is primarily associated with the recognition of interlocutors. In the case of interactions between states, interlocutors are defined by the acceptance of common characteristics, which allow them to be regarded as autonomous –or potentially autonomous– entities. They can recognize in each other the independent ability to act sovereignly, for example, in the formulation and implementation of national laws and public policies. Incoherence would then emerge if the parties can recognize these common abilities but are increasingly incapable of pointing to their singularity in exercising these basic functions. It would also emerge if they can still point to their singularity, such as acting fairly when establishing laws and strategies of public policies and making use of overwhelming resources to back these strategies, yet are in fact unable to defend it in practice, creating a gap between what is said and what is done. States would be unable to strike a balance between the idealization of their abilities and the experience that actually supports them. In these cases, they would be constrained in their ability to come up with reasonable kinds of justifications to their existence, and ethical standards established by these agents would be frail, hence easily non-observed or re-interpreted. In my view, such an internal incoherence seems more likely to become evident when the ethical practice is exposed to broader kinds of transformations, such as those imposed by globalization nowadays. The revolution of the means of communication, based on new information and transport technologies, drastically curtails distance and time, transforming the way we interact with each other. It also substantially contributes to the emergence of new sorts of threats: climate change, uncontrolled migration, currency fluctuations, terrorism and so forth. In face of these changes, we are compelled to find new ways of formulating and implementing public decisions. To a great extent, in order to cope with and respond to such new dynamics, traditionally political

authority structures, such as states, are subjected to greater fragmentation and become more flexible and adaptable. We observe the expansion and deepening of regional structures of political power, such as the European Union, as well as supranational ones in the form of the United Nations. The latter, for example, multiplies the number of agencies and the complexity of its missions around the globe. Furthermore, we observe the establishment of a more meaningful, straighter kind of interaction between states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or transnational corporations (TNCs), which increasingly assert their authority in normative and policy-making issues. The UN Secretariat's decision to seek agreement with TNCs and civil society to conclude the 1999 Global Compact illustrates this point. In view of corporate interest in maintaining a regulatory framework for their contractual agreements and the pressure of civil society groups to increase foreign direct investment in the world's poorest countries, the UN Secretariat ended up negotiating with TNCs and civil society directly after the failure of an inter-state type of agreement (Coleman 2003, p. 399).

Indeed, trans-border socio-economic activities have increased so dramatically in the last two decades that governments find themselves in a difficult position, unable to unilaterally provide for the necessary regulations of such activities. Co-ordination and cooperation become indispensable in the provision of political order albeit difficult to achieve considering the multiplicity of threats and the activism of new political actors. As Weiss remarks, there is currently a patchwork of authorities that although diffuse, make efforts to provide certain order, stability and predictability for this new world (Weiss 2015, p. 15).

The above global transformations affect the identification of the state as a primarily collective moral agency in international relations. States' independent abilities to define and pursue common actions based on its citizens' broader interests are at stake. States are being obliged not only to delegate their capacity of decision-making to supranational structures, such as the regional blocks but also to exercise this capacity in partnership with new transnational actors from civil society. Even if a large part of these partnerships is initiated by states, they transform the nature of the latter by questioning their capacity to act autonomously. States growingly have to rely on concerted initiatives amongst each other, as well as between themselves and other centers of power, in order to guarantee basic services for their own citizens. For instance, economic regulation depends on global corporate regulations for tax evasion or central banks' coordination to deal with fluctuation in the currencies affecting trade. The physical integrity of states' citizens against terrorist attacks is also dependent on partnerships established with representatives of the private sector. The code of conduct established in mid-2016 by the European Commission along with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft, in order to combat the spread of hate speech on the web and halt the recruitment of new members by extremist movements, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), illustrates the point.

The fading ability of states to actually identify and act on the basis of their singularity jeopardizes their capacity to construct valid ethical standards for global practices. This is particularly the case when we take a closer look at the normative

discourse of international intervention. To keep up with global changes, the UN framework evolves into the defense of sovereignty as responsibility. But this so-called evolution ultimately questions the capacity of the state, or the community of states, of presenting itself as a distinguishing guarantor of citizens' basic needs and of formulating viable parameters for multilateral action, as shown below.

Changes in normative narratives and practices of international intervention

Legitimate multilateral intervention is primarily carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. It is broadly framed by the UN Charter 1945, which reaffirms non-intervention principles and commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. The major hiatus in the Charter is obviously Chapter VII, according to which the SC can authorize, as a last resort, the use of sanctions and force to resolve disputes among states. The flexibility of the state members' invocation of Chapter VII to defend humanitarian causes has long been wrapped in controversy, given its ability to harm the inviolability of state borders and self-determination. Nevertheless, the 1995 UN guideline for peace-keeping operations does its best to preserve the foundational principles of the Charter while envisaging ways to find solutions for humanitarian catastrophes, standing up for the diplomatic resolution of conflicts, impartiality and consent of the parts in on-the-ground activities (UN (United Nations) 1995). In so doing, it reaffirms the view that a state suffering from temporary conditions of fragility is an exception that confirms the rule. States' fragility is provisory and can be overcome by their own efforts, even if co-operative endeavors with the broader international community take place.

Such a light-toned perception of intervention underwent changes during the '90s, following the international community's failure to respond to humanitarian tragedies in Rwanda and Kosovo. Two normative developments followed these experiences. First, the Brahimi Report delivered in 2000 links UN peace operations to the need to respond to humanitarian and human rights catastrophes and to the duty to protect civilians (UN (United Nations) 2000). It emphasizes the value of peace-building with a transitional administration and respect for the rule of law and human rights. Second, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine emerges just one year after the Report. It is the product of a change in the perception of threats, increasingly linked to terrorism and massive migration with the expectation of regional contagion. It also reflects the demands of active representatives of a global society, such as those NGOs responsible for dealing with the flood of migrants in 1994 escaping from the Rwanda genocide, outside the UN umbrella and public broadcasting companies covering events in Kosovo between 1998 and 1999, most particularly the BBC (British Broadcasting Company).

R2P establishes that all states must protect their population (human security). Should a state fail in its obligations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action. It elevates international intervention to a new dimension. It clearly enunciates the existence of fragile states, failing states who "through weakness or ill-will harbour those dangerous to others, or states that can

only maintain internal order by means of gross human rights violations” (ICISS 2001). Moreover, it puts the international community under the obligation of intervening in these states in order to guarantee international peace and security.

The R2P doctrine formally maintains the concept of sovereignty while rendering flexible states the ability to act in a self-determined way. It is presented as a product of normative evolution, responding to collective expectations regarding the appropriate behavior of the international community in face of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. In such a context, it is imperative to act preventively to avoid mass atrocities and secure a safe international environment where states can exercise their autonomous capacities in a responsible way. But this interpretation of intervention paves the way for theoretical inconsistencies inside the liberal framework. The doctrine provides a fatal coup in the principle of self-determination, the one that along with the non-intervention principle, is supposed to serve as the main standard of behavior among states. Since the principle of self-determination is based on responsibilities that states can actually bear, it faces open-ended questions: What do these responsibilities legitimately imply? How well can states perform them today? If traditionally this kind of questions implied value judgments and interventionist actions primarily formed inside the community of states, it is now potentially subjected to the scrutiny of other political actors interacting at a global level.

In attempts to overcome inconsistency and keep the normative framework together, academic circles and the staff of multilateral organizations present arguments reaffirming states' singularity in bearing and assigning some collective responsibilities in international relations. In Academia, a particular argument has been growing in strength. The state basically defended as the most appropriate agency to carry out public duties on the basis of fairness and ample respect for human rights, has specific duties towards its citizens. Once its ability to perform these duties is affected by global issues, it is legitimate for the state to act globally to remediate the issue. Beardsworth, for instance, argues that it is not only in the interest of all members of the international community to reverse the situation of fragility of certain states to attain peace but also their political duty to do so in view of guaranteeing the integrity of their citizens' interaction in a globalized world (Beardsworth 2015). Such an argument resonates with the current UN understanding of international intervention. According to the narrative constructed inside this multilateral organization, the community of states not only knows exactly what these agents' ethical capacities are but can also recognize, respect and even help to improve these capacities in members facing structural or circumstantial obstacles. That is the reason why multilateral intervention should be pursued on the basis of consensus, impartiality, local ownership and respect for universal human rights.

It is worth keeping in mind that this normative narrative of international intervention is accompanied by an ideal representation of the relation between the intervener and the state facing a situation of fragility, which hides an asymmetrical relation of power. On the one hand, one has the UN representing the entire international community under a liberal framework, but actually subjected to the authority of a few

members with veto-powers; on the other hand, there are states that consensually admit that they are in need of a helping hand from the international community, in terms of material resources and expertise, in order to ascend to the supposed condition of full autonomy. In emphasizing such a dichotomy and successfully developing ways to make these last states accept it, the UN positions itself as a privileged interlocutor that is able to shape their perception of not only their fragilities but also the responsibilities they should hold in face of such fragilities.

However, the question that must be posed is whether or not the UN can still sustain such a representation of reality within an increasingly interdependent environment. Will the UN still be able to legitimize its position by coherently combining the above normative narrative with the management of its missions' ground-operations? This question is particularly important in that it establishes whether or not powerful state members of the international community are actually able to sustain the arguments they help to shape. A wide gap between what is said in UN texts and reports and what is actually done on the ground would indicate that they are not only unable to convince, co-opt and control a weak or less powerful member of their arguments, but in fact also struggle to defend the essential value behind these arguments, relative to the state's distinctive ability to perform certain functions as a collective agency in opposition to other political actors.

As it will be illustrated below in the analysis of state-building missions in Kosovo and Iraq, the UN's adoption of a pragmatic approach which aims at achieving quick results on the ground has undermined the observance of ethical standards established by member states. The narrative emphasizing impartiality, consensual involvement and political ownership persists, however, the UN missions continue to expand their aims and resources in a way that jeopardizes the actual respect for these standards. This expansion comes hand in hand with the increasingly intrusive nature of the missions' initiatives, including the imposition of legal or economic approaches to the societies in question. These intrusive actions are justified by UN Secretary-General reports in terms of the fulfillment of the local population's expectations, the exceptional circumstances they face and the technical advantages of a UN system.

Notwithstanding, these justifications clash with the accounts of political representatives, civil society and media representatives working on the ground. Some of these actors actively contest the presence of UN missions and the way it defines and carries state-building activities. Moreover, these justifications overlook the fact that civil society's representatives come to actively participate as co-partners in the development and implementation of state-building strategies, offering alternatives that are more context-based and in line with what the local population demands.

Building state capabilities: UN missions in Kosovo and Iraq

The need to quickly end the violation derived from the ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians leads the international community to work assertively to re-establish public order after the expulsion from Kosovo of the forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1244 in June 1999,

establishing The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) with the security presence of NATO-led Forces. UNMIK's mandate revolves around the establishment of an interim civil administration, the promotion of autonomy and self-government and the easing of a political process to determine Kosovo's future status. It clearly states that the mission aims at the promotion of democratic self-government institutions as a solution to re-establish stability in the region (UN (United Nations) 2009).

A striking feature of the mission is the concentration of political power in the hands of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) at the detriment of local representatives' participation. This special representative is, in fact, the legal head of state in Kosovo and is responsible for administrative issues, economic reconstruction, civil order and the supervision of the political process. A movement seeking recognition of local ownership, through the establishment of the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in 2001, is greatly undermined by the continually tight control of UN representatives over the activities undertaken by Kosovo representatives. The preamble of the Constitutional Framework states that the institution of a Provisional Institution of Self-Government 'shall not, in any case, affect or diminish the ultimate authority of the SRSG' (UNMIK 2001). There would be a transfer of certain functions to the Provisional Institution but SRSG would retain oversight of most competencies concerning executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

In November 2001, Bernard Kouchner established the UN-controlled Joint Interim Administration Structure (JIAS) to institutionalize local consultation in UNMIK decision-making, paving the way for the co-optation of Kosovo political representatives. In this arrangement, there would be a dual-desk system of local co-heads who would advise the heads of UNMIK's administrative departments. But, these arrangements ultimately suffer from a severe shortcoming. Narten claims that (Narten 2008, p. 378), they allowed for further domination of local space by Kosovo-Albanian elites in detriment of the Kosovo-Serbians. This domination would lead to an increase in political divisions and a feeling of unrest among local people.

The UN mission's attempt to tame its intrusiveness and gather support for its activities leads to the establishment of the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo (OIK) by UNMIK in 2000. The institution was provided with the mandate to investigate complaints against UNMIK and local public administration. However, this initiative also showed severe drawbacks. The most remarkable one is the very limited accountability measures available to the OIK to address inappropriate conduct. For example, OIK criticized the political standards of the mission, pointing to the fact that they clash with fundamental principles such as respect for the rule of law and the separation of powers (Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo 2005). In these terms, the maintenance of these standards tends to deprive Kosovans of their basic rights, yet, as Narten points out, little attention was given to the argument (Narten 2008, p. 381). In further proof of its lack of effectiveness, OIK was transferred in 2006 to Kosovar control but explicitly deprived of its authority to accept and investigate complaints against international administrative bodies in Kosovo (UNMIK (United Nations

Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) 2006, chapters 3 and 4).

The increasing gap between what is said and what is done winds up damaging the UN mission's credibility. Both the Kosovo-Albanian elite and the population grow increasingly uncomfortable with UNMIK's failure to fulfill the promise of full devolution of external powers (Narten 2008, p. 382). Contestation movements spread, culminating in the March 2004 Riots led by a Kosovo-Serbian community frustrated and plagued by unemployment. The authoritative character of the UN mission is denounced by locals and publicized by international actors. An example is Albin Kurti's arrest in February 2007 after leading a demonstration against Maarti Ahtisaaris, the SRG (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General) accused of intending to halt the devolution process. Amnesty International denounced the 'politically-motivated' character of Mr. Kurti's subsequent prosecution. The International Helsinki Federation (IHF) also raised concerns about the independence of the Judiciary when monitoring Kurti's trial (Lemay-Hébert 2012, p. 94). The critical involvement of these international actors points precisely to the lack of functioning accountability mechanisms to supervise the UN mission.

The legitimacy of the UN mission continues to deteriorate with a broad lack of support for the UN peace-building agenda, failed multilateral initiatives to discuss Kosovo's status and aggravating socio-economic conditions. The new government in Prishtina then decides to unilaterally declare Kosovo's independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008. As a consequence, UNMIK's tasks and configuration suffer substantial changes, forcing it to focus on the promotion of security, stability and human rights.

The clash between the normative narrative defended by the UN and its controversial interventionist practices is also observed in Iraq. UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq) was established in August 2003 through SC Resolution 1500 to help reconstruct Iraq's state capabilities after the war in view of international security concerns after the 9/11 attacks and the international campaign against terrorism. It has been on the ground ever since, with its functions expanded in 2007 with the passage of Resolution 1770. The mission's mandate revolves around far-reaching activities, such as providing advice, supporting the advancement of national dialogue, strengthening election processes, reviewing the constitution, resolving dispute border, facilitating the International Compact for Iraq's reconstruction, improving Iraq's capacities to provide essential services, as well as promoting human rights and judicial and legal reforms.

The enlarged purposes of the mission are balanced by the need to recognize Iraq's integrity. In pursuing its functions, UNAMI must not only respect Iraq's cultural and socio-political unity but also pursue its own activities as long as they fulfill the demands of the Iraqi people. In rhetoric terms, the mission would be mandated "as circumstances permit" and "at the request of the Government of Iraq" (United Nations, 2003). This rhetoric is further inserted in the UN's reports on the mission in order to justify interventionist practices. For example, the UN Secretary-General reported in March 2005 that there was a general expectation, both inside and outside Iraq, that the UN should play an active role in supporting the constitution-making process (United Nations, 2005).

The rhetorical justification for interventionist action is accompanied by strategies of co-opting interlocutors, which proves to be unsustainable in the long run. At a national level, the international community backs the formation of a Governing Council and later on of an Interim Iraqi Government, but shapes the representation of political forces inside these structures. The Sunni representative gradually assumes an active political role in detriment of its Shi'a counterpart, who conquer formal power but are feared by its potential radicalism. (Allawi 2007, p. 280). This imbalance in representation leads to contestation in the form of local insurgencies and terrorist attacks, one of the most publicized being the attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003 which resulted in the death of the Chief of Mission Sergio Vieira de Mello.

The attempt of UNAMI staff to incorporate international political actors into the decision-making process, while maintaining a firm grip on the leadership and coordination of procedures that lead to common decisions also faces limitations. The UN finally issues an official report on regional criticism regarding what happens on the ground. For instance, the UN Secretary reported that after a tour of the region in early 2007, some senior government officials from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey criticized the way in which the violent situation was handled, as well as the actions of some external actors inside Iraq (United Nations 2007). Stronger criticisms are further raised from 2011 concerning the handling of illegal immigrants and terrorist infiltration through Syria's Border (UN (United Nations) 2012).

The UN's attempt to co-ordinate consultative works with a number of regional political representatives, local associations and international activists comes hand in hand with those actors' growing engagement in the definition of state-building strategies on the ground, a consequence of the unforeseen dynamics established between them and the organization. In December 2004, UNHCHR and the UNAMI Human Rights Office organized a mapping meeting in Geneva to share information on UN activities. During the meeting, a list of activities projected in Iraq for 2005 and 2006 was established not only by UN agencies (UNAMI, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNCHR, and UNIFEM) but also by 40 interested governments and about 30 representatives from international civil society organizations (UN (United Nations) 2004b). On the basis of their activism, over the years civil society comes to assume shared responsibilities with UN staff, particularly on regional development and humanitarian assistance.

The co-optation strategy is also accompanied by a tight communication strategy. The UN's Iraq website was established in both Arabic and English in February 2004, providing databases, a map center, Iraq media monitoring, document archiving, and discussion forums on the mission (UN (United Nations) 2004a). Over the years, it has regularly been updated and expanded to include other services, such as the Directorate concerning NGO working on the ground. Though justified on the basis of transparency and accountability concerns, the installation and expansion of the UN's Iraq website also serve to validate the existence of selected actors of civil society, as well as educate Iraqis on the purposes of the mission and legitimize these purposes.

With the justification that the socio-political situation is proving more complex than initially envisaged, the UN, backed by SC mandates, intensifies the interventionist character of the mission. The overstretched character of the constitutional activities pursued by the mission's staff in 2009 illustrates that UN staff are no longer either broadly promoting dialogue between the Government of Iraq and regional leaderships or engaging with the leaders of major parliamentary blocs with regard to the status of the constitutional review process (UN (United Nations) 2009). They were also providing technical and legal advice to specific Committees of the Council of Representatives on constitutional and legislative matters and presenting options through the Constitutional Review Committee to resolve sensitive matters, such as the hydrocarbon legislation (Ibid 2009).

Such an increasingly interventionist approach, though backed by some sectors of the population interested in bringing a minimum of stability to their daily lives, fails to secure the broader support of national political forces. This lack of support is demonstrated in the Secretary General's report on the continued absence of a statutes-of-mission agreement for UNAMI in 2013, despite the organization's innumerable demands to Iraq's government for this agreement over the years. Up until today, the legitimacy of the UN's mission seems to remain a subject of contestation (UN (United Nations) 2013).

Diffusion of power and the increasing fluidity in the assignment of blame

As shown above, UN missions in Kosovo and Iraq promoted extremely interventionist activities covering a broad and complex range of issues, from security to the design of Constitutional frameworks and the training of a state bureaucracy. In order to justify this approach, they appealed to particular interpretations of a liberally normative framework, emphasizing national consent, local ownership, and good governance. But their appeal to a liberal normativity, in fact, proved to be merely rhetorical when confronted with a challenging context. UN missions on the ground faced a problem in the design of clearly delineated objectives, instruments, and resources to accompany the activities leading to state-building capacities. "Recalibration exercises", by which the UN mission staff together with other international agencies on the ground re-evaluated what should be really done, remained the strategy employed to deal with observed shortcomings. Such a strategy revealed UN concerns about flexibility and adaptability. Getting the job done in face of a complex environment becomes the organization's ultimate target.

Nevertheless, what became the UN's chosen strategy to efficiently tackle the gap between the normative narrative and actual initiatives, was the establishment of co-ordinate efforts among the UN, local representatives, and regional and transnational actors. These efforts were pursued while the UN attempted to maintain a tight grip on the formulation of state-building strategies and the process of communication, particularly with the establishment of websites to the missions, which helped the organization to control the ways the mission was generally perceived at home and abroad. The UN's ability to control the dynamics of state-building in the above countries was,

however, substantially affected by complementing and yet unexpected developments on the ground. Tensions with regards to competing demands and expectations from international administration and local representatives were observed in the definition of policies and norms during the studied period of the missions. The observation of these tensions serves to confirm Chesterman's arguments (Chesterman 2004, pp. 253-255). According to this author, there is no vacuum of power inside fragile states, even with a fragmented or non-existent institutional structure. Local political elites continue to express their power through informal mechanisms, besides being a source of contestation to the external imposition of values and rules.

In many ways, the voices of local political representatives were amplified by the activism of local and transnational members of civil society, such as student movements, local NGOs, advocacy-based INGOs, and international media. The dynamism of civil society's representatives was in fact expressed not only in their capacity for contestation, frequently pointing fingers at who should, in fact, be blamed for an action, but also in their ability to build strong ties with local reality. In the latter sense, civil society's representatives acted as efficient agents of assistance and development, sharing responsibilities with the international community and the concerned states.

These superposed types of interactions among UN staff, local and transnational actors derive from a globalization process and have consequences in the power structure that defines international intervention. The political power exercised by states, or more specifically by the community of states represented by the UN within the practice of intervention, becomes more diffused. New channels of contestation, questioning patronizing and biased initiatives towards locals inside intervened countries, emerge. It is no longer so obvious to defend idealized narratives based on the dualistic and biased representation of the interaction between the intervener and the one that suffers intervention, as expressed by the UN framework.

In this scenario, political actors' capacity to shape or influence decisions tends to change according to the kind of dynamics in which they find themselves. The assignment of blame acquires fluidity. It becomes context-dependent, much more linked to the role each political actor is efficiently capable of playing inside multiples layers of socio-political interactions defining a situation of intervention, than to pre-framed forms of normative discourse and collective actions defended by the international community of states.

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