Moral Agency in Global Practices of Responsibility: Assessing UN Humanitarian Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

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Abstract
The concept of moral responsibility is increasingly being deployed in world politics. The international community invokes doctrines such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s legal decisions to hold political actors accountable for universal obligations. While the subject has become of prominent interest among political philosophers, insufficient attention has been directed towards understanding the changing nature of the agent carrying this responsibility. The autonomy and rationality of agents are largely considered detrimental to a profound analysis of the value of agency as a social practice that can enable or disable moral responsibility. One remarkable exception is Hoover's work emphasising not only that a responsible agent is a social construction, as in Frost and Linklater, but also that the act of holding responsible is a coercive and creative political act. Though I agree with Hoover in principle that the allocation of responsibility largely reflects the way in which privileged agents portray marginalised others, I claim that the particularities of globalization are reshaping traditionally perceived relations of power. Particularities related to the multiplicity of poles of authority and their dynamic interactions are rendering the portrait of moral agents less evident in terms of clear-cut dichotomies. As a result, the allocation of responsibilities among them has become more diffuse. To support my claim, I analyse the United Nations' (UN) mandate and reports produced during the 10 years of the UN Humanitarian Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI). I specify the development and changing character of collective moral agents' identities in this precise global practice of responsibility.

Keywords: moral responsibility, global practice, UNAMI

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1) Moral responsibility as an object of concern in world politics and academic circles

The moral concept of responsibility has been increasingly deployed in world politics today. The international community invokes doctrines such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to support intervention in fragile states. Simultaneously, corporate responsibility has become a subject to be seriously considered in international business, as shown by the establishment of the United Nations' (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in 2011. Following the trend, political theorists are showing a steadily increasing interest in analysing the concept. However, much attention has been given to possible objects of responsibility ascription (actions, omissions, consequences, characters, etc.) that is detrimental to a more profound understanding of the changing nature of the agent who carries the moral responsibility. This paper is motivated by the perception that no credible assignment of moral responsibility can exist without a critical comprehension of the limits of the agents who are supposed to bear such a responsibility.

The core literature on moral responsibility presupposes a modern notion of agent as someone capable of evaluating reasons for acting based on his or her free will. Liberal cosmopolitans understand that ethical reasoning is fundamentally defined by individuals' ability to exercise their universal rationality (Barry 1996, Beitz 1999). Pointing to the utopianism of this perspective, liberal internationalists admit that this capacity depends on the existence of a well-ordered political structure inside which associative obligations are born (Walzer 1994; Rawls 2000).

In view of expanding the potentiality of this perspective, constitutive theory affirms that moral agents are constituted through social practices (Frost 2003). Such practices have ethical codes responsible for framing agents' responsibilities embedded in them. Frost, for example, admits that moral responsibilities will change and develop in response to the broader social transformations occurring in an increasingly globalised world. However, he offers few clues about how these responsibilities change. Hoover's (2012) critical approach represents a move forward from this mainstream thought. This author explores the idea that the responsible agent a socially constructed agent and that the act of holding someone responsible is a coercive, creative political act.

Hoover's critical understanding of moral agency's constitutiveness is particularly helpful in a global environment with no final political authority apart from that of sovereign states. In this scenario, the allocation of responsibility largely reflects the way in which privileged agents, powerful states and the multilateral institutions formed by them portray marginalised others. While it is helpful, Hoover's approach seems limited. It offers few clues about how globalization helps reshape traditionally perceived relations of power between political agents, therefore affecting the notion of a morally responsible agent.

In an increasingly globalised world, a growing number of multi-connected actors can pursue common interests in an organised, effective way. They directly or indirectly participate in global governance. I claim that in this context, the sovereign state is led to reassess not only its political role but also the way in which it reinforces its legitimacy as a prominently collective moral agency. The sovereign state faces pressure from its citizens and transnational actors to become more assertive in regulating the socio-political environment, which increasingly transcends national borders; it also faces pressure to become more responsive to these actors' demands by offering them a relevant role in the formulation and implementation of multilateral initiatives.

The reassignment of the state's role leads to the emergence of a new power dynamic among international political actors involved in global practices of responsibility. Arguably, it contributes to a diffusion of power among political actors and therefore to a redefinition of the traditional ways of perceiving morally responsible agency.

The analysis of the UN Humanitarian Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the most enduring multilateral effort to reconstruct a fragile state, illustrates the way in which liberally dominant states are obliged to reevaluate their roles within a global practice of responsibility. It also illustrates the extent to which such reevaluation pave the way to a diffusion of power among political units and consequently to the redefinition of morally responsible agency in a less clear-cut dichotomy than the one implied by the characterization of states into fragile and non-fragile states.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section analyses the conception of moral agency and its responsibilities in view of social practices. The following section discusses the types of pressures globalization brings to such analysis. The third section assesses UNAMI within the context of a global practice of responsibility. It shows how global moral responsibilities have been assigned and to whom they have been assigned. Consequently, it sheds light on the type of moral agency that has been privileged in these interactions and the ways in which this kind of notion is enforced and eventually challenged today. The fourth section presents some concluding remarks.

2) Assessing the concept of morally responsible agency *vis-à-vis* social practices

The individual is the moral agent *par excellence*. He is potentially capable of ethical reasoning and acting based on such reasoning, bearing responsibility for his acts. More precisely, the individual is a rational being capable of defining his objectives and pursuing them in the most efficient way. He can also exercise his rational capacities *vis-à-vis* others. His freedom to choose and act based on these choices is limited by a recognition of the same ability in others. Moreover, he sees others with a certain integrity, not as a means to achieve specified objectives but as ends in themselves. Only in that way can he and those around him be considered fully valid interlocutors capable of understanding and respecting commitments, which means bearing responsibilities.

The autonomous individual described here needs to be part of a well-regulated social environment to develop his ethical capacities. He needs to be a citizen of a state in which members are expected to relate to each other fairly and recognise each other as equally valid interlocutors while directly or indirectly participating in practices of public decision. As Frost remarks, these public practices, which are backed by the state's monopolistic use of force, embed ethical codes. Such codes are responsible for establishing the value of a citizen's action, which refers to what is to be praised or blamed in society.

However, it is worth noting that historically situated practices are necessarily marked by inequalities of power among practitioners regardless of the state's ability to ensure a minimum level of fairness among them. Ethical codes suffer from the influence of power politics. The actors who most efficiently use their material resources, such as economic advantage, or immaterial resources, such as influence and persuasion, can determine what is blameworthy and who is to be blamed. In this sense, the identity of morally responsible agents will be largely framed by the way in which powerful identities successfully portray themselves in the face of less-privileged others.

The overwhelming public blame of financiers for the 2008 global economic crisis illustrates this point. Public protests, such as the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests against socioeconomic inequality, singled out undue corporate influence on democracy. In contrast, central banks and other regulators were targeted less after the crisis, even though they significantly contributed to it by tolerating unfair financial practices.

This reference to the 2008 global economic crisis leads us to pose some relevant questions. Can states be considered units bearing moral responsibility in international relations? Is it possible to extend ethical reasoning from the individual to this specific collective? The answers must be in the affirmative, though with some reservations. As Erskine (2003, 21) remarks, many points of comparison between the individual moral agent and the state can be established. The state is structurally organised. It has a singular identity, considering that a distinct politico-cultural identity among citizens is born from their involvement in the process of public reasoning. It enjoys a certain autonomy due to its ability to define and pursue common actions based on its citizens' broader interests. As O'Neill (1986) remarks, states even have greater power of action and independence from external intervention than individuals or other collectives. They have at their disposal more sophisticated means of gathering information and processing it to organise action, as their ability to declare war shows (O'Neill 1986, 51). The state can also understand the consequences of its actions and recognise that other collectives have similar capacities of action and understanding.

However, the state lacks external conditions that impinge on individuals' exercise of ethical reasoning. In the international environment, no sovereign political authority can both secure a minimum level of fairness among the involved parts and enforce their commitments through the monopolistic use of force. Multilateral agreements to establish international cooperation are ultimately subjected to the discretionary power of governments, and they can easily be aborted without the governments suffering an overwhelming punishment. The United States' use of international law to validate their grand strategic aims, such as the war against terrorism, is often used as an illustration of this. It was in view of these aims that the United States attempted to rely on international law and the UN apparatus in 2003 to justify the invasion of Iraq by the Coalition of the Willing.

In such an environment, the most powerful states tend to have a greater advantage than other states that lack the enabling conditions to fully act autonomously. The latter states lack internal means or depend on foreign aid and expertise to exercise basic state capacities. For example, they are characterised by corrupted governments, weak education systems and underdeveloped infrastructure. In political theory, these states have been popularly labelled as quasi-states or deficient states, terms coined by Jackson (1990) and Rawls (2000), respectively. In the language of multilateral organizations, such as the UN and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), they are commonly referred to as fragile, weak or failed states, depending on the level of their disorganization as sovereign political units.

In these different descriptions, incapable states are defined as temporarily less fit moral agents compared to fully democratic and economically developed states. However, definitions of the unfitness of moral agency and what such a state should accomplish to elevate itself to the category of full autonomy are made within global practices of responsibility. It greatly depends on the way in which powerful liberal states portray themselves in ideal terms through the process of devaluing and reconstructing other, less-privileged states as valid interlocutors.

The complex features of globalization introduce a new dynamic to the above reasoning. The multiplicity of poles of authority and their intensive interactions challenge the way in which states are supposed to exercise power. In doing so, they influence the current ability of powerful states to portray themselves in ideal terms in relation to other less-privileged ones, which paves the way for a reassessment of traditional forms of defining morally responsible agency.

3) Globalization, social practices and the changing perception of a state's moral responsibilities

Globalization is marked by complex diversity. A growing number of actors are dynamically interacting with one another in an intricate kind of dynamism (Sarquis 2014). Using quick means of communications, states and members of civil society are multiplying their representations in supranational structures (e.g. the European Union), international organizations, international nongovernment organizations (INGs) and multinational corporations. They not only are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information but also have more opportunities to exchange viewpoints based on this information flow. According to Held (1996), globalization brings 'a widening, deepening and speeding up of social interactions in all aspects of contemporary life, creating new flows of activities, relations and the exercise of power' (16).

Because of their exposition to information and the opportunity to act socially, representatives of the state and civil society can more easily question not only who they are but also how they should act to affirm themselves and their goals at the national and international levels. They are prone to more actively influencing decision-making processes, including those that sustain international norms. Rosenau memorably discusses the newly generated activity of such actors and the political consequences. For him, the world today has become denser with multiple spheres of authority (SOAs) directing global governance to assume a multi-level dimension, which leads to top-down governance, network governance, bottom-up governance, side-by-side governance, market governance and Möbius-web governance. In this scenario, both the authority of the state and the normativity generated by it cannot easily be taken for granted (Rosenau 2004, 35).

In this complex scenario, the state is obliged to reconsider the way in which it exercises its political role and reinforces its legitimacy as a collective moral agency. On one hand, the state faces pressure to be more assertive than in the past in the definition of global responsibilities for itself and other political actors in international relations. Complex social interactions among different political actors require regulation in domains as diverse as financial transactions, migration, environmental pollution and humanitarian disasters. The state remains the most powerful and identifiable unit that can organise multilateral regulative actions in these domains. The adoption of the responsibility to protect the R2P doctrine during the 1990s after the UN's failure to respond to humanitarian disasters in Rwanda illustrates the point. This doctrine assigns to the international political community the responsibility to intervene with technical support, followed by military action as a last resort when states fail to protect their citizens from mass human-rights violations.

On the other hand, the state is obliged to become more responsive than before to the particular demands of a growing number of public and private international actors. The state is compelled to not only recognise their significance as interlocutors, even if they do not enjoy the same political status as the state, but also incorporate them and their demands into the

international public decision-making process. For example, the Security Council arguably adopted the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) only after receiving extensive criticism from NGOs and other human rights observers for not intervening earlier to stop the genocide in the country.

This impetus for states to be more assertive in their actions concerning international regulation and responsive to the demands of a new string of political actors becomes evident when analysing UNAMI as a global practice of responsibility. During the 11 years of the mission's existence, UN staff and member-states were led to expand interventionist initiatives to reconstruct Iraq's state capabilities while leaning on the participation of Iraqi representatives and international civic groups in the decision-making processes to legitimize these initiatives. Consequently, a new power dynamic among the international political actors involved in this global practice of responsibility has gradually emerged. A diffusion of power among political actors can be observed, which will eventually lead to a redefinition of moral agency in a less clear-cut dichotomy, such as the one implied in the characterization of fragile and non-fragile states. I will analyse these points in more detail in the following section.

4) UNAMI as a Global Practice of Responsibility

UNAMI 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 largely been considered one of the biggest challenges the organization has faced. It has continued for over 11 years, and it employs vast organizational resources, with almost all relevant agencies of the UN system actively involved in projects aiming at national reconstruction. On July 2014, the Security Council (SC) adopted Resolution 2169, extending UNAMI's mission for another year.

The mission's mandate revolves around activities concentrated in three main areas. The first area involves a political set of activities providing advice, support and assistance to the Iraqi government in advancing national dialogue and reconciliation; strengthening election and referendum processes; reviewing the constitution and implementing constitutional provisions; and resolving disputed internal borders. The second area covers an economic set of activities involving promotion, support and facilitation in implementing the International Compact for Iraq's reconstruction and implementing programs to improve Iraq's capacities to provide essential services and attain sustainable development. The third area involves a set of humanitarian and institutional activities including the promotion of human rights and judicial and legal reform.

Such an array of activities provides first-hand testimony regarding the increasingly interventionist functions conferred by the SC to the UN staff on the ground. However, the interventionist character of the mission is balanced by the need to recognise 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 the recipients show a clear willingness to receive international assistance. The mission is mandated 'as circumstances permit' and 'at the request of the Government of Iraq' (SC Resolution 2110, July 2013).

This dual logic attached to UNAMI's mandate is reflected in the UN Secretary General's reports on the mission. Produced each trimester, these reports provide a regular description of the socioeconomic environment in Iraq and the activities carried out by the UN and its interlocutors. They also offer a consistent, detailed narrative of UNAMI in the context of a global practice of responsibility, which is the focal point of my analysis.

In the context of a global practice of responsibility, UNAMI can be represented by an axis. One side of the axis includes the member states responsible for issuing mandates and UN agencies and staff carrying out the responsibilities specified in the mandate. The other side of the axis includes Iraq's fragile state institutions: governmental, legislative and judiciary bodies. They not only receive the international community's aid but also share the responsibility to pursue the objectives specified in UN mandates. Other political actors rotate around this axis. Among them are political leaders representing Arab Sunni, Kurdish and Shi'a communities; local organizations defending women's, political prisoners' and children's rights; the World Bank; representatives of the international intellectual community; regional governments (especially Kuwait, Jordan, Iran and Egypt); and transnational business corporations.

Because the socio-political situation in Iraq is proving more complex than initially envisaged, the UN staff on the ground, backed by SC mandates, has developed an increasingly assertive approach to their activities. One striking example relates to the overstretched character of the constitutional activities pursued by the mission's staff in 2009. These activities included promoting dialogue between the Government of Iraq and regional leaderships (S/2009/393, July 2009); engaging with the leaders of major parliamentary blocs regarding the status of the constitutional review process; providing technical and legal advice to specific Committees of the Council of Representatives on constitutional and legislative matters (S/2009/102, February 2009); holding round-table discussions with Iraqi policymakers to consider hydrocarbon management (S/2009/102, February 2009); and presenting options through the Constitutional Review Committee to resolve the hydrocarbon issue at the constitutional level (S/2009/393, July 2009).

Another example is UNAMI's engagement in the formulation of the 'Iraq Briefing Book' by UNAMI. In March 2011, the UN Secretary General reported that UNAMI and the UN country teams stepped up their engagement with their official counterparts after the establishment of the new government. On behalf of the Iraq Partners Forum, the UN special representative submitted the 'Iraq Briefing Book' to Prime Minister al-Maliki. This book 'outlines policy recommendations in areas such as private sector development, provision of essential services, human rights and governance reform and provides a basis for future discussions between Iraqi authorities and international partners' (S/2011/213, March 2011).

The UN's assertive approach to activities on the ground is often accompanied by two kinds of justifications. The first relates to the fact that UNAMI fulfils demands from the Iraqi people. In these terms, 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 (S/2005/141, March 2005). The second kind of justification, as stated in the October 2007 report, relates to what is perceived as 'the UN's distinct comparative advantage' of enjoying both good relations with a wide range of actors from across the political spectrum and a wide range of best practices gained from operating in conflicts across the globe (S/2007/608, October 2007).

Moreover, the UN's mission relies heavily on a strategy of communication to pursue its activities. The UN's Iraq website was established in both Arabic and English in February 2004, providing databases, a map centre, Iraq media monitoring, document archiving and discussion forums on the mission (S/2004/625, February 2004). Over the years, it has regularly been updated and expanded to include other services, such as the directorate concerning NGOs working on the ground. Though justified based on transparency and accountability concerns, the installation and expansion of the UN's Iraq website also educates Iraqis on the purposes of the mission and legitimizes these purposes.

A 'guided' type of inclusiveness balances the assertive character of the mission. UNAMI's staff is clearly attempting to incorporate other international political actors in the decision-making process while maintaining a firm grip on the leadership and coordination of procedures leading to common decisions. The UN Secretary General's reports presented in 2004 and 2005 illustrate the point. In December 2004, UNHCHR and the UNAMI Human Rights Office organised a mapping meeting in Geneva to share information on UN activities. During the meeting, a list of projected activities in Iraq for 2005 and 2006 was established by UN agencies (UNAMI, UNHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNCHR and the UN Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM]), 40 interested governments and about 30 representatives from international civil society organizations (S/2004/959, December 2004). Following the same principle, the UN Secretary General reported in June 2005 on the mission's informal staff meeting with INGOs and embassies to exchange information and ensure effective coordination in the field of constitution creation (S/2005/141).

The above points implicitly illustrate an ideal portrait of the relation between morally fit *versus* unfit collective agency and the type of responsibility each agency is supposed to bear in the global practice known as UNAMI. The fit moral agent, here represented by the UN and its member states, is characterised by a certain autonomy representing the broader international community's interests instead of the SC's specific interests. This agent's actions are based on the best interests of such a community and are marked by impartiality. This argument of impartiality is pursued throughout reports in different areas. For example, the Secretary General stated in June 2005 that UNAMI's role is to provide impartial and objective reporting on returnees, displacement and compensation issues (S/2007/373, June 2007). Any stronger interventionist action by the mission's staff is justified based on the need to reinstall Iraq's autonomous state capacities; the Iraqi people constantly recognise this need.

According to the Secretary General's reports, the Iraqi people demand such an action. In contrast to this fit moral agent, Iraq is a temporarily unfit member of the international community. In the reports, Iraq's state is portrayed as not having the necessary means to enjoy full membership in such a community. For example, the Secretary General's 2005 report remarks on the unpreparedness of national staff, 'with less direction than preferred', to deal with security concerns affecting the implementation of the mission's activities (S/2005/373, June 2005) The Iraqi people are nonetheless perceived as willing to work in partnership to advance a liberal agenda, ranging from the establishment of democratic institutions to the defence of extensive human rights, to obtain autonomy and full membership in the international community.

The ideal portrait of the dichotomy between a morally fit and an unfit moral agent is directly influenced by the power relations between the main practitioners of the particular global practice of responsibility known as UNAMI. On one hand, the UN and its member states have at their disposal the economic power to build and allocate funds for Iraq reconstruction; the

accumulated experience and technical expertise to help formulate, coordinate and implement the projects; and the ability to interpret international legal instruments to legitimise the mission's activities. On the other hand, Iraq cannot perform its basic state functions because its socioeconomic infrastructure was destroyed and its political forces were fragmented. Regardless of its reluctance, Iraq must accept the terms from the UN/international community to work in partnership to re-establish full statehood. Iraqi's reluctance to fully accept the terms of this partnership is illustrated by the reports of constant security problems facing UN staff working on the ground, culminating with the murder of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary in 2003. It is also illustrated by the continued absence of a status-of-mission agreement for UNAMI, despite the UN's innumerable demands to Iraq's government for this agreement.

It is relevant to note that the power relation between these two poles of global practice suffer from the influence of the new international political actors' activity. The activity of such actors, who are allied with Iraq's fragile ability to influence the definition of UNAMI activities, allows a diffusion of power among political units, even though this diffusion is restrained. International activists, local associations, regional political representatives and intellectual communities are increasingly engaged in the activities carried out by the mission and share moral responsibilities with the mission. The international actors' activity is illustrated in the Secretary General's reports on UNAMI during the 11 years of its existence, particularly in sections related to regional development and humanitarian assistance. This activity is sometimes accompanied by criticism. For example, the UN Secretary reported that after a tour of the region at the beginning of 2007, some senior government officials from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey criticised the way in which the violent situation was handled and the actions of some external actors inside Iraq (S/2007/126, March 2007).

However, one fundamental question remains to be answered: is the diffusion of power observed among the political units here sufficient to challenge the clear-cut dichotomy implied in the above portrait of moral agency? The answer is partially affirmative. To reinforce its legitimacy, the UN's mission has increasingly tended to frame moral responsibilities in view of 1) the historically situated particularities of the less-privileged agent and 2) the input offered by a broader audience of international political actors who can not only voice their concerns but also make these concerns heard by engaging in the mission's decision-making process and extensively using social media. In these terms, the diffusion of power observed here necessarily brings a certain amount of flexibility to the interpretation of what moral agency is and what it bears in terms of responsibility.

However, this flexibility is limited. UNAMI's reports show that a dominant agent can still creatively make use of the available power resources to restrain the emergence of a critical other who substantively contests the ideal portrait of moral agency. It is important to remember that the UN staff and member-states played a substantial role in not only drafting Iraq's sustainable development goals (S/2010/240, May 2010) but also Iraq's adoption of the UN Conventions (S/2008/688, November 2008) and Millennium Goals (S/2010/359, July 2010). The mission's promotion of these different initiatives prove that the privileged collective self still wants less-privileged others to reflect its image, therefore minimally challenging its dominance.

5) Concluding Remarks

The arguments pursued here are not intended to question UNAMI's purposes or the reconstruction of Iraq's state capabilities in the face of a humanitarian disaster and security concerns; instead, they are intended to examine the way in which these purposes have been legitimised by the UN member-states and staff on the ground. These two collective actors must be more critical of how they exercise power and conduct multilateral actions in a global environment.

The analysis of the UN mission in Iraq showed that the UN member-states and staff became more affirmative in their initiatives, expanded their capabilities and demanded a stronger commitment to international rules from their counterparts. At the same time, it showed that these collective actors increasingly incorporate the demands of international civic societies' active members in the decision-making process, making it relatively inclusive and open to 'checks'. However praiseworthy, the changes in the way in which these dominantly collective agents exercise power illustrate a dangerous tendency. A fit collective agent is prone to demanding too much from a less-fit moral agent in too little time. In so doing, the agent risks assigning the less-fit agent responsibilities it cannot fulfil.

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