

**Kurt Mills.** *International Responses to Mass Atrocities in Africa: Responsibility to Protect, Prosecute, and Palliate.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 320 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4737-4.

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Kurt Mills's *International Responses to Mass Atrocities in Africa* is a much-needed addition to literature on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), norms development, and humanitarianism. Mills makes explicit what is intended by the R2P-inspired call to "do something" about mass atrocities as he explains the three P's of response (R2P<sup>3</sup>): responsibility to protect, responsibility to prosecute, and responsibility to palliate. His most interesting contributions to the literature are the framing of humanitarian work as palliation and questioning the usefulness of palliation when it is not undertaken in concert with other approaches. Mills's perspective provides ample reason to be more reflective about responses to mass atrocity so that they can actually accomplish their intended goals.

The project of this book is to be more specific about the expectations of responses to mass atrocities. Examination of cases shows that goals are varying and, at times, conflicting, which makes naming them conceptually helpful. Protection focuses on a more substantial responsibility than is envisioned in more traditional protection of civilians (PoC) approaches. Prosecution is emphasized in the actions of *ad hoc* tribunals, national courts, special courts, or the International Criminal Court (ICC). Palliation is the work done by humanitari-

ans to care for those in the middle of conflict, and Mills's use of this term evoking end of life palliative care is quite purposeful. He describes the important and difficult work of humanitarians while also exposing the practical limitations of such work, as it focuses on the symptoms rather than the cure.

Access to populations in need of such care often requires an impartiality on the part of humanitarians which makes it difficult for them to engage in the other goals of R2P<sup>3</sup>. Being overly critical of the governments of host countries in which humanitarians operate may result in their expulsion. This consideration can also underscore conflicts between the broader, political goals of human rights responses--particularly prosecution--and the specific goals of humanitarianism, which focus primarily on keeping people alive in the middle of conflict. Mills uses the analogy of the refugee camp as hospice as he explains the challenge of humanitarian care, in which people are kept alive "until the war--either directly through an attack by armed forces or indirectly through malnutrition and war-associated disease--kills them" (p. 22). Through explaining the three P's of R2P<sup>3</sup> Mills is able to highlight the at times incongruous nature of these components, and the complexity of responses to mass atrocity.

It is the lack of specificity about what response is required, what the relationship between actors ought to be, and where responsibility lies that allows governments to strategically use the language of R2P to their political advantage. Without such specificity, states are able to actively obfuscate their responsibility to meaningfully do something as they instead back measures that provide a veneer of response without doing what actually needs to be done to reach the goals of R2P. In other words, the norm of R2P has grown even as international political will remains selective.

In choosing cases on the African continent, Mills shows this variation of political will as he compares the relative lack of response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) despite millions of dead against the much more substantial attention given to anything that can be construed as part of the war on terror. While both certainly feature violations of basic human rights, Mills makes clear that action related to the war on terror garners significantly more international political will than do the horrors related to the DRC and Africa's World War.

Mills goes through extensive reviews of four key cases to provide cautionary tales of piecemeal responses that permit atrocities to cross borders (Rwanda to the DRC, and Uganda to both the DRC and South Sudan), of responses in which the lack of coordination of actors can disproportionately impact humanitarians given their daily local interactions (kidnappings or attacks on humanitarians after ICC warrants in the DRC and Darfur), or of responses that rely on the state in such a way that humanitarians find themselves either enabling state control of local populations (Uganda) or being unable to more overtly criticize human rights violations if such criticism risks endangering humanitarian access to populations in need (DRC, Uganda, and Darfur).

The must-read case study which best highlights the gap between the norm of R2P and the

responses to mass atrocities at the local level is the chapter on Uganda. In this carefully presented chapter, Mills is able to show the full complexity of responses to mass atrocity, and the problem of unreflective imperatives to do something. The Ugandan government was able to co-opt humanitarian imperatives to "do something" to such an extent that humanitarian aid could be counted upon in calculations of government actions to bring populations under more direct government control. This was shown in the example of Ugandan government's mass relocation projects, which would have been prohibitively expensive had not food, medical supplies, and shelter aid come from humanitarians who intended to respond to the very real needs of people on the ground without looking at the overall cause of the crisis. The government was also able to encourage international concern about and criminal warrants for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) while escaping criticism of its actions, even when some of these actions employed tactics similar to those of the LRA. This case also showed the challenges of the peace versus justice debate in an ongoing conflict, when attempts at prosecution may prolong conflict while at the same time local peace initiatives may be inadequate for victims who do want prosecutions. This chapter builds on previous cases of palliation that made it easier for states to avoid actual responsibility to "do something" while simultaneously lowering the costs for the Ugandan government to commit atrocities of its own.

Through these cases, Mills shows that each of the three P's, unsurprisingly, do not automatically reinforce each other. The goals for different actors can conflict with the work of other actors. This is most strongly emphasized in conflicts between human rights actors' emphasis on prosecution and humanitarian actors' emphasis on providing care to those in the midst of war. Mills also highlights the challenges for humanitarians themselves in terms of the broader goals of ending mass atrocity, as their palliative neutrality can instead prolong the conflict or even be co-opted by

state actors. Indeed, these state agents sometimes find that they can include humanitarian care as part of their strategic and logistical considerations in order to provide a veneer of good will toward ending mass atrocity. Mills's framing particular humanitarian responses as palliation helps highlight the ways in which the very good motivations of humanitarians--the motivation to provide care--may sometimes interfere with broader goals to end the conflict fueling the atrocities.

Mills provides voice to the realistic power concerns of those who may hold responsibility but do not want to use resources to do something any more than will pacify activists, those who are concerned about the impact of R2P on their sovereignty but who also see ways that the language of R2P can be capitalized on to advocate for interventions which benefit their side, and those human rights and humanitarian actors on the ground whose goals often need to be balanced with the practical questions of what can be done in that moment given lack of political will to provide the support needed for such actors to more fully realize their goals. In providing this voice, he also calls readers to be more cautious and reflective. Most importantly, his text provides concrete reasons why those using international norms like R2P to encourage their own states to respond to mass atrocity themselves need to take such power concerns much more realistically. In the messiness of response to mass atrocity, if the political will garnered is minimal it is unlikely to meet local activists' demands. Unsupported and poorly coordinated responses can actually lead to spreading conflict across other borders rather than ending atrocity. Unsupported humanitarians are left to garner what access they can, which often involves turning an eye away from atrocities committed by the government in whose state they find themselves, or at least avoiding systemic documentation and outcry against such behaviors. The takeaway for those committed to a meaningful response to mass atrocity that can live up to

the norm of R2P is that they should pay close attention.

Mills also shows the distance between the development of the R2P norm and the implementation of the norm as he carefully shows the conflicts within the norm itself, and the strong influence of political will on the success or failure of its implementation. In showing this process of norm creation, development, and implantation on the African continent, Mills situates the continent as a fundamental site of knowledge for international relations, both in the development of R2P after international failures in Rwanda and in the implementation of R2P. He frequently highlights the disparity between the norm and the practice in very helpful ways that permit readers to see exactly why specificity about R2P<sup>3</sup> is required for successful attainment of goals. It is the selective application of norms by those without the political will to fully implement them that is often the problem. This is certainly not a new phenomenon, as this challenge from power politics is seen more broadly in human rights norms, but it is helpful that Mills specifically names the problem within the R2P literature.

In helping readers understand the palliative component of humanitarianism, the selective application of R2P norms, and the tensions between human rights goals and humanitarian goals, Mills shows the messiness of international efforts to "do something" when the political will does not exist for concrete measures that will end mass atrocities. Part of this is answered by naming the goals of responses in R2P<sup>3</sup> so that expectations are clear, facilitating coordination and thoughtful responses. The other part of the answer is to encourage advocacy from specialists and other readers of his text as they use the more specific language of R2P<sup>3</sup> and a healthy hope that drives all such actors committed to seeing more meaningful application of norms. The epigraph quoting Zap Mama which starts the book shows why Mills's cautionary tale still gives cause for hope: "it's not

too late for making a new world; it's not too late for making a better world." Making R2P<sup>3</sup> explicit makes it possible to see its differing, and sometimes conflicting, goals, and, to plan a response accordingly. Not just any response will do, if the goal is to end atrocities.

In addition to helping practitioners better coordinate, Mills's approach can strengthen the advocacy efforts of all who wish to see R2P employed to actually end mass atrocities under way. Specificity in the advocated response lets governments and international organizations know exactly what response will satisfy the demands of the advocacy, making it difficult to satisfy demands for actions with veneers which lack substance. It is better to have some response than no response, but Mills demonstrates that this type of response to situations of atrocity often leaves victims in an in-between world by keeping them alive without making anything about the underlying situation better.

Mills helps us more clearly understand what is increasingly meant by R2P, particularly the question of R2P<sup>3</sup>, and is especially successful at showing the tensions between the conflicting responses to mass atrocity and the contexts in which humanitarians find themselves. Mill's work helps to question the gap between the goals of humanitarian action and the practice. By connecting this with palliative care, readers are able to rethink humanitarianism itself as well as responses to mass atrocities more broadly so that such responses can make a new and better world.

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