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# Decentralization in Violent Conflict Zones: Views from the Periphery

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**Decentralization in Violent Conflict Zones:**

**Views from the Periphery**

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PIM 73

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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## Decentralization in Violent Conflict Zones: Views from the Periphery

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**Abstract**

This thesis looks at the question of, “How can nations on the periphery of global capitalism sustainably negotiate with nations in the center of global capitalist power in the process of governance decentralization in violent conflict zones?” Decentralization here describes the process of power transfer of fiscal, political, and administrative duties from higher and more centralized entities to lower and more localized divisions. The process of decentralization is employed to cultivate participatory democratization, minority advocacy, peacebuilding, and development. Because of the nature of these needs decentralization is often accompanied by international intervention that uses the justification of “failed statehood.” This capstone uses interviews with practitioners in the fields of academia, development, conflict transformation, and human rights activism and those with direct experience of decentralization processes, along with extensive research into case studies with a range of efficacy, to extricate some of the difficulties and conflicting agendas that plague decentralization. This capstone employs a mixture between ground theory qualitative analysis and Participatory Action Research to clarify the complexities of decentralization primarily to those in the margins of global power. This research showed that decentralization must always be internally-led but that accountability, capacity, and challenging the status quo can prove difficult, forcing many nations to seek external aid or assistance that often comes with strings attached. Such negotiating with power may be necessary, but the alternatives that exist are useful to explore and extrapolate upon for guidance.

*Keywords: Decentralization, liberalism, failed state, peacebuilding, development, and violent conflict*

## **Introduction**

This capstone project seeks to outline the complex trajectories of decentralization initiatives in order to support those on the peripheries of global capitalism in negotiating most effectively with external international forces in processes of decentralization. Decentralization is the process of power transfer of fiscal, political, and administrative duties from higher and more centralized entities to lower and more localized divisions. The last ten years have seen a dramatic upswing of decentralization efforts in violent conflict-affected societies, and many are surprised at the general support voiced across sectarian divides and even by many authoritarian leaders in that many, if not most, government reform initiatives fail to receive this magnitude of diverse support (USAID, 2009). However, decentralization efforts are often plagued by failures and insufficiency in achieving the primary goals of decentralization of democratization, peacebuilding, and development for a wide host of reasons. Despite these difficulties, a burgeoning international aid budget allotted to decentralization proves ongoing confidence in its value. This aid allocation represents one angle of a trend of international support for decentralization that often results in interventions that may be welcomed or unrequested, foreign or organic.

The bulk of nations facing decentralization are so called “failed states,” which is a term that points to various aspects of governmental, civil society, and state instability. Failed statehood is often used by global powers to justify international interventions, especially from the U.S., that range from developmental and peacebuilding to militaristic. These interventions have mixed effects on the sustainability of decentralizations goals of concerning good governance, peacebuilding, democracy, economic development and the like, due in large part to the varying agendas of actors inside and outside of the country and those in a wide range of

relative power positions. The interventions by the U.S. government particularly, but also transnational organizations such as the World Bank, are of their very nature subject to suspicion of neo-colonial, neoliberal, or geo-political interests, yet they can also often provide tools and support that are desperately needed by fragile nations. The complex and contextual agendas of these international agents must be weighed in conjunction with the grounded needs of the nation or locale in question in determining the most effective route towards decentralization and its ultimate goals of positive peace, stable participatory democracy, and economic sustainability. It is clear that decentralization must be internally-led and that conflicts of interests and power dynamics of “center and periphery” agents must be subtly analyzed and navigated. Alternatives to negotiating with global power and its interests do exist. Some of these alternatives are South-South (Arai, Personal Communication, 2014) lending structures, forms of peripheral solidarity, and working with more neutral or peripherally aligned agents emerging from within global power centers.

Decentralization advocates posit that decentralized power promotes human rights, peacebuilding, peripheral empowerment, statebuilding, and development, but cases on the ground demonstrate that context is key to the actualization of these goals. This research shows that the level and means of negotiating with global power structures and local and internal leadership are crucial elements in determining the ultimate efficacy of a decentralization process. Decentralization can never occur without a nation’s internal buy-in even if there is strong external (international) or top-down leveraging or financing. I additionally found that in many cases, nations in violent conflict may choose, or be forced to choose, to accept aid and external presence or force in enacting decentralization processes. However the pros and cons of this



intervention must be carefully weighed to avoid destroying the very internal buy-in needed to decentralize.

## **Background**

I was, and to some extent still am, a socialist-libertarian, who dreams of practical utopias, horizontal governance, direct democracy and alternatives to capitalism. I have grounded experience in a wide variety of communities living and “*preguntando caminando*” (walking while questioning) towards these alternative modes of existence ranging from Anarchist squat communities in the Bay area of California to the Zapatista autonomy organizing in the jungles of Chiapas, Southern Mexico. I learned from these experiences that a vastly different world is possible than what is widely accepted. However, I also feel the need to personally develop a grounded realism that confronts the limits of these ideologies in the face of a dynamic world facing an endless variety of challenges and opportunities. There is a point at which more leftist and more economically liberal approaches to decentralization not only don’t meet but actually bear intrinsically different aims and procedures in terms of such factors as economic direction, level of local sovereignty, global integration, and visions for democracy. For these reasons, I find decentralization to be a fascinating entry into larger questions of power, ethics, and justice, even as I acknowledge that there is no panacea to political turmoil and that despite a desire for ideological purity of means, there is a world facing a great violence right now, and many diverse strategies are needed. I believe that decentralization is an important piece of these much needed tactics but that it’s not a perfect fit for all situations. To expose my positionality in this background section I hope to undermine my own biases in writing this capstone.

*Zapatismo*

In the year 2012 and then again in 2014, I had the humbling honor to visit political centers, or *caracoles* (literal translation, “snail”), in the Zapatista autonomous zones in the southeastern Chiapas jungles of Mexico which catalyzed my interest in decentralization. We, the guests, had opportunities to ask questions and learn more about the functioning of their political and economic system. We learned that they have five major municipalities which have many *pueblos*, or villages, roughly constituting at least 60,000 Zapatistas (Carlsen, 2014; L@s Zapatistas, 2012). They have no centralized government but instead only three levels of organization; collectives, pueblos, and caracole/municipality. In each caracole there is something called the *Juntas De Buen Gobierno (JBG)*, or councils of good government, which are the constantly rotating municipality level representatives to each village. I was fascinated by a strange phenomenon of the JBG members responding to several of our questions with the simple answer of, “*No se* (I don’t know).” They explained that they could not make a statement on that topic without consulting the people of the individual pueblos from whence they’d travelled and whom they represent. These Zapatistas are in political positions, but they are in fact farmers, students, teachers, mothers, weavers, doctors, herbalists and the like. Anyone can serve for a period on the Juntas as a form of *cargo*, or responsibility to the community. Each person’s cargo is a consented upon form of service to the community although not all people choose to serve a cargo on the JBG.

My second visit was to the *Las Escuelitas para Justicia y Libertad* (Little Schools for Justice and Liberty) in the caracole of “*La Realidad*” (the reality). These Zapatista-led classes inside the autonomous zones taught how these decentralized, highly socialized, multi-lingual, quite sustainable, and largely politically horizontal societies worked together. We learned about

their struggles and successes and the stories of how they came to be. We additionally learned about the complex systems of collectives that women use to assert their power as a major force in Zapatista development. These autonomous zones do not offer a utopia or perfect solution to the issues of democracy, power, and decentralization, but they do deeply challenge the far more conservative and neoliberal notions of what decentralization can or should look like and, what is more, how far it can go.

*Participatory Collectives in the U.S.*

In the Bay Area of California, particularly in Oakland and San Francisco, I was involved with several horizontal collectives, anarchist squats (abandoned buildings converted into living spaces), and experiments in alternative living and decision-making models. During this time I was also living amidst high homicide and crime zones, which first inspired me to think about violent conflict and conflict transformation. It was in these environments that I found my initial passion for participatory self-governance and co-operative horizontalism in politics and economics.

These participatory models that I interacted with were always imperfect in the sense that they are forced, by virtue of their positions, to work within late-capitalism, and as such, absorbed many facets of oppressive hierarchical systems of (free-market) competition. Racism, transphobia, greed, and the like plagued these experiments, even as we constantly fought and struggled with every available mechanism to overcome these obstacles. We dumpstered (salvaged food from dumpsters) clean food and collected day-old donations (that were to be thrown out) to decrease waste. We would take that food and make giant stews with stale bread and feed hundreds of grateful homeless people and ourselves a healthy, vegan meal as a “Food Not Bombs” collective initiative.

My squatter communities opened up abandoned buildings in order to create homes for struggling families and working class poor who were incidentally largely queer<sup>1</sup> and/or people of color. We adopted models of, “Step up and step back” approaches to dialogue meaning to stand up against oppression but take a step back in dialogue if you are encouraged by your privilege to overshare or speak over other people. We spent hours exploring the values and limits of consensus-based decision making in high stress or large-group situations. We learned a lot about what is possible or what we should be aiming for regardless of what we think, or is actually, possible within our given circumstances. Through these systems, many highly marginalized populations with limited access to social services such as transgender sex workers and single mothers of color were provided with housing and community even as we fought internally to navigate our prejudices in a way that could make us more inclusive. Through decentralized systems of internal governance and mutual aid/solidarity we were able to more effectively challenge these biases and incorporate solutions even as the obstacles we faced were dangerous and seemingly insurmountable. These initiatives worked against reformist politics, or political initiatives that compromise their values to make small gains, in efforts to create pre-figurative political processes, or initiatives where the means of achieving a political ends mirrored the ultimate goal. These attempts at prefigurative political actions and avoiding all parliamentarian or reformist approaches to advocacy, offer distinct value-adds to my understanding of decentralization even though I eventually found them to verge on being politically reactionary. Because of my internal critique of my own reactionary politics, I spent the next several years immersing myself in more parliamentarian approaches to political change and decentralization

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<sup>1</sup> Persons who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender non-conforming, intersex, et cetera.

which led me to becoming involved with increasingly higher and more international levels of politics, which are further revealed in the course of this capstone.

## **Methodology**

This capstone uses qualitative analysis of interviews of practitioners, academics, and those with direct experience surrounding decentralization in addition to extensive research of peer-reviewed academic literature, grey literature such as programs documents and technical guides, and a range of case studies from effective to unsuccessful applications of decentralization. Furthermore this capstone employs critical theory research, such as post-colonial theory, in order to get closer to the heart of the complex issues of power and governance surrounding decentralization. The intention is to create a useful product for academicians, policy-makers, program implementers, and lay persons affected by decentralization, especially those coming from the so-called “Global South,” “developing nations,” or global power peripheries.

## *Geographies*

Although most of the locations studied for this case study such as Somalia, Syria, the Balkans, and Sierra Leone are or were enmeshed in ongoing conflict, several of the locations chosen for these case studies are not suffering from what is commonly recognized as violent-conflict or active warfare such as Switzerland, Vermont, China, Brazil, and the Bay Area.

However, all of these areas were chosen for specific reasons based on the contributions they have

to offer to our understanding of decentralization. For example, although Brazil and the Bay Area<sup>2</sup> may not be considered war zones, they do have high violence and low state accountability areas within them (Saenz, 2004; Slakmon, 2007). Additionally, although Pakistan was not necessarily led to decentralization by fragile statehood or war, but rather by a military coup, its decentralization was ultimately affected by violent conflict in surrounding nations, the federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region (Samdani, 2014), and negative peace (Galtung, 2004) along many of its borders much like China's stalemates with the U.S. and Japan. Finally, Vermont is by no means a violent-conflict zone unless possibly you consider its low-intensity war on indigenous persons and persons of color, but it does have institutionalized forms of decentralization and local control over state politics, including bans on money in politics, which make it a noteworthy example even if it is a different context.

### *Center-Periphery Theory*

“Center”, or core, and “Periphery” theory, in its use in this research, draws heavily from the knowledge movement of “World-Systems analysis,” brought to life notably by Emmanuel Wallerstein. Drawing from, but severing dramatically from Neo-Marxist analysis such as Dependency theory and the tools of Marxist dialectics, World-Systems analysis seeks to break apart traditional methodologies of historical analyses to reveal the dynamic and holistic interplay of co-emergent systems of interlocking economies, cultures, geographies, etc. World-systems analysis makes use of the term “core,” or “central” nations to describe Capitalist (in this moment) hegemons and metropolises while peripheries and semi-peripheries are the objects of

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<sup>2</sup> The Bay Area was analyzed as an entire region rather than just on its decentralized enclaves and internal movements.

extrapolation of resources used to fuel the centers and their trajectories. In this model, exploitation and the maintenance of a centered status-quo is required in order to justify and maintain power. What is more, we are in a modern-world system of global capitalism that depends on the unending accumulation of capital (Wallerstein, 2004) and is as such an unsustainable growth-system on a finite landscape (Phōtopoulos, 1997, p. 171-173).

In this capstone thesis, “Center-Periphery” will be used in order to complexify ideas of local, national, and international positions in order to locate the nested webs of power and agency. For example although, South-Asia may be considered a periphery of the global market, it has centers within it, such as India or even within that, Mumbai. Additionally, those centers have smaller minorities and surrounding areas that are peripheral to its powers. What’s more, peripheral cities in peripheral south-Asian countries may yet have peripheral urban locales that are subverted by what to them are urban centers, yet to the nation may be peripheral.

Decentralization, understood as a dynamic process of peripheral empowerment, can be analyzed for its relevance upon many levels of entrenched yet malleable power dynamics using center-periphery theory. To clarify these almost fractal interplays I will often add prefixes such as global, national, local to designate the level of centricity or periphery. For example, global-center will refer to countries such as the U.S., China, and Japan while a national-periphery region in the U.S. may refer to cities such as Detroit, Michigan. These above ideas will be touched upon more deeply in the analysis sections after and during the research overview.

### *Research Methodologies*

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is “a way of collecting information for organizing that honors, centers, and reflects the experiences of people most directly affected by issues in our

communities (INCITE, 2005).” Because this research is guided by persons directly affected by decentralization and will be distributed in a way intended to aid a greater body of those directly affected by decentralization, this project is on the PAR spectrum (Bradbury and Reason, 2001; INCITE, 2005). The product of this capstone will be two-fold. There will be a final capstone thesis (this paper) which will be used to develop a “lay persons” or “duty-bearers” guide to be distributed amongst those interviewed and related connections in community, civil society, policy, administration, or governance, or who interact with decentralization (see Annex 1).

The participants interviewed were all people whom I know and who have either: lived through a government decentralization process following a violent conflict and/or have direct work experience with governments or institutions in processes of decentralization. I interviewed 5 individuals between the ages of 25 and 50, both male and female, and of a variety of races, ethnic, or national origin. The bulk of the interviewees are of international birth or citizenship to the United States. The interviews were semi-structured, standardized yet informal, and one-on-one. They were open-ended but generally no shorter than an hour long. The primary questions asked had to do with the participants experience and location of experience surrounding decentralization and their analyses of the efficacy and ethics surrounding the way in which decentralization occurred. Additionally I asked them to come up with something like a lessons learned to guide a visioning for an ideal decentralization process which I used to guide my recommendations.

I used a mixed method and qualitative research approach that combines grounded theory with qualitative comparative analysis of interviews and grey literature which were then coded and combined with case study lessons learned (O’Leary, 2005; Schutt, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This analysis was guided by the insight provided by the interviews themselves. This



analysis was deepened using critical theory, and a colonial-critical application of “center/periphery” theory. These resources, were then juxtaposed with more moderate reports and programmatic guides and theories coming largely from USAID (2009).

### *Research Process*

For my interviewee research I spoke with persons mainly representing distinct regions that attempted or are working through decentralization efforts. These regions are: Pakistan; Chiapas, Mexico; Myanmar; Libya; Somalia; the California Bay Area; and the Balkans. The interviewees are professors, peace practitioners, people in the development field, activists, civilians, and government officials. Mehlaqa Sadmani, speaking primarily of Pakistan, was born in a village in the now called Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), studies and teaches about governance, and works doing interfaith peacebuilding. Tatsushi Arai is a professor at SIT and a peacebuilder with humbling international experience doing peacebuilding and mediation with violent conflict zones from Rwanda to Syria and has extensive familiarity with center/periphery politics of decentralization. Charlotte Saenz is a Mexican-American professor and activist with extensive experience working in the Southern Mexican autonomy politics of the Zapatistas and co-runs a media and radical agricultural network for alternatives to global power structures in addition to being a professor. Andrej Grubačić is a Balkan activist and self-described Anarchist with extensive personal experience in decentralization efforts in the former Yugoslavia as well as in other arenas through his new position as head of an Anthropology and Social Change graduate program in San Francisco.<sup>3</sup> My last interviewee, who chose to remain anonymous, speaks primarily of the Libyan experience as a citizen, activist, and former

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<sup>3</sup> Andrej had a personal emergency at the time of the interviewing but gave me access to a few interviews and writings on this topic that served to replace his formal interview.

international aid employee. I supplemented this interview data with a variety of scholarly and programmatic case-studies in order to fill out and diversify the overall research information.

## **Decentralization Overview and Domains**

Decentralization, in its most basic form, is the transfer of power, resources, and responsibility from higher (centralized) to lower (localized or peripheral) levels of governance and administration (USAID, 2009). The goal of decentralization, especially in violent conflict zones, is to create participatory governance more capable of addressing local and minority needs in a sustainable way. Ideally, this method promotes positive peace and peacebuilding while strengthening state infrastructure and aiding stability, development, and the capacity of the government to address a variety of obstacles (USAID, 2009, p.5).

These decentralization overview sections are primarily devoted to explaining, in simpler terms, the framework, goals, and tenants of decentralization as understood by USAID. USAID defines three core areas, or “dimensions” of decentralization in its programming --- *political, fiscal, and administrative* (USAID, 2009, p. 10). They are all three of equal importance and yet are often carried out with different levels of priority by governments and international actors (Dabo et al., 2010;Menkhaus, 2014). Political decentralization is the category of practice most covered by this capstone but it is yet imperative to go over all three as they will all be referenced. USAID then sorts the types of structural changes that decentralization implies into affecting the four categories of: *authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity* (USAID, 2009, p. 7). These types and directions of changes that decentralization aims for will be used to clarify both the USAID programmatic language usage and goals, in addition to the overall goals of decentralization as I define it here.

### *Political Decentralization*

Political decentralization shifts political authority to subnational governments. Political decentralization usually happens through constitutional amendments and electoral reforms to create or strengthen subnational political representation and agency (USAID, 2009). This process often involves the shift from the centralized appointment of subnational officials to their local election. Some examples of useful tools to increase the accountability of subnational officials are voter recalls of officials or their decisions, referenda, town hall or council sessions open to the public to increase transparency, and freedom of information which also increases transparency.

### *Fiscal Decentralization*

Fiscal decentralization is the enlarging of revenues and expenditures for subnational governments and administrative units through any number of means. The main concern of those pursuing fiscal decentralizations is the allocation of financial and tax commodities along with an expectation of functional subnational responsibilities. However, in pursuing fiscal decentralization, it is imperative to assess the creditworthiness and effective transparency of the subnational unit to avoid simply moving corruption down the chain as is often the case.

### *Administrative Decentralization*

Administrative decentralization entails the shifting of the responsibility and management of public functions from centralized national government into subnational units (USAID, 2009). Administrative decentralization works mainly within the structures and procedures of

institutions. It can lend credibility and effectiveness to local units especially in interacting with heterogeneous interests and traditional or indigenous localized power structures. Administrative decentralization can create accountability as well because, depending on whether it is deconcentration or devolution, subnational units are either still accountable to centralized governments or, via the latter, really responsible for the implementation of autonomizing functions, giving them additional authority over government officials.

### *Forms of Decentralization*

Decentralization tends to take three primary forms: Deconcentration, Delegation, and Devolution (USAID, 2009). According to USAID programmatic guides, deconcentration is the most minimal of decentralizations forms in terms of overall changes made. Deconcentration involves, “national government reassigning responsibilities to the field offices of national ministries without placing these offices under the control of subnational governments” (USAID, 2009, p.9). This basically means that decision-making power is moved amongst different locales of centralized national governments authority. Deconcentration can create stronger field presence of national-central government especially by penetrating into disputed, national-peripheral, or marginalized areas which points to its particular usefulness in post-violent conflict zones and “fragile states.”<sup>4</sup> Delegation is a bigger shift in governance structures than decontration because it reassigns, “responsibility for specifically defined functions to subnational governments or administrative unit” (USAID, 2009, p.9). Delegation is usually used as a building block towards devolution. Devolution is an imperative concept to understanding

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<sup>4</sup> A fragile state is basically employed here to mean a state that is incapable of providing for the basic human needs of those it attempts to govern. A variety of definitions exist and will be further elaborated upon at a later point in this essay.

decentralization, that marks the largest structural shifts, requiring “subnational governments to hold defined spheres of autonomous action, which typically means the use of subnational elections” (USAID, 2009, p.9). For this reason, devolution can only happen alongside its intricately linked sister praxis of *political* decentralization. The USAID Democratic Decentralization Programmatic Handbook (2009, p.9) also states that,

*Seperately elected decision makers in subnational governments may be largely independent of the national government, but they are still bound by the provisions of national laws (such as those regarding political rights and civil liberties), national policy priorities (including meeting basic needs and reducing poverty), and national standards (in such areas as fiscal responsibility, healthcare, and water quality).*

This quote is employed to show how in devolution, subnational units find a greater level of autonomy but still remain under the overall control of some aspects of central-national authority. This quote also points to one of the most important and difficult areas of decentralization which has to do with localized and peripheral autonomy (provincialization). In this provincialization, some degree of autonomy is granted to the localized entities. Various versions of this form of provincial federalism are often employed along ethnic, tribal, or political lines to varying degrees of efficacy. There is always a tension in devolution of how much autonomy to grant these subnational units and how much to retain in central authority to best achieve the goals of stability, democracy, development, and peace. In addition to these three primary forms of decentralization, other sources also recognize privatization and partnership to have potential uses in decentralization (Technical Cooperation Department, 1998). Privatization, is the more economically neoliberal approach involving a smaller government that opens up markets to corporations to provide localized social services. Partnership, on the other hand is when the

government creates agreements with civil-society organizations in order to actualize decentralization processes.

## **Decentralization and Peacebuilding**

The reason why decentralization, in its many forms, is being turned to by international peacebuilding efforts is because it can provide basic (rule of) law, security and dispute resolution, solidify peace accords, enhance women's participation/gender mainstreaming, and enhance peripheral minority or localized participation in government affairs. Notably, decentralization puts the locus of decision-making closer to those most directly affected. Such governance would more effectively provide services into the hands of those in need and protect those in the peripheries from the dangers of disconnected, central, and elite control over their livelihoods (de Simone, 20013; Haider, 2009; Menkhaus, 2014; UNDP, 2010; US-AID, 2009).

These possibilities become all the more crucial in violent conflict-affected society or so called "fragile" or "failed" states. In violent conflict-affected societies such as those pre-, during, or post-war, the ability of a state to deliver needed services in a way that is effective, efficient, inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and just becomes massively frustrated, often to the point where the state has little to no practical authority over its territory or territories. Additionally, a variety of internal and external actors exploit the desperation and power-vacuum of failed states as we can see in the ISIS invasion of Syria and Libya or the US manipulation of the Taliban in Afghanistan as a tool to fight Russia and the later invasion of Afghanistan to secure U.S. oil interests under the claim of "nation-building" and "countering violent-extremism" in a failed and fragile state context.

A Latin American critical and post-colonial theorist named Bendaña (2005) writes about how there was a shift in language from nation-building towards peacebuilding with a continuing mission of external intervention. This “neoliberal” shift accomplished the task of veiling certain militaristic agendas while emphasizing other more social reforms. This is essential to understanding one aspect of the many factors guiding global-central interventions in decentralization processes. He writes that, “Substituting the term nation-building with peacebuilding, preferred by the UN, did not substantially change the presumptions of the necessity to apply external military and economic power to force regime changes and then refurbish governmental institutions in a Western-oriented, market-friendly fashion (Bendaña, 2005, p.11). This “liberal internationalism” is run by the “paradigmatic assumption that the surest foundation for peace, both within and between states, is market democracy, that is, a liberal democratic polity and market-oriented economy” (Paris, 1997, p. 56). Liberal internationalism underlies the prevailing paradigmatic assumptions of the field of western-headed or global-central peacebuilding (Paris, 2010) despite massive internal debate around factors including the potential destabilizing effects of these very same practices (Paris, 1997). For instance, in Rwanda and Angola, liberal internationalism in peacebuilding sparked the resurgence of violence while in Bosnia it further divided separatist parties (Paris, 1997, p.56). Despite cases like these and others failures liberal internationalism in peacebuilding such as in Mozambique, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, liberal internationalism in nation building remains the most accepted and researched form of peacebuilding for international agents and is heavily supported, by global-central agencies, such as the World Bank and the UNDP and national-centric agencies such as USAID, as a method of sustainable peace making (Paris, 1997, p.61-62). Therefore, when

decentralization is used as a tool of peacebuilding by global-central (especially Western) powers, it is most often used to contribute towards a liberal internationalist approach to peacebuilding.

## **Decentralization and Statebuilding**

As defined by USAID, statehood is concerned with the relationship between government and governed (ARD, 2005, p.1). More specifically, in this interpretation, statehood concerns the effectiveness and legitimacy of a government in terms of its political institutions, security (concerning military, police, and borders), economic (concerning growth), and social factors (concerning rights and social services) (ARD, 2005, p.1). Fragile states, are those that have a “poor relationship” between government and the governed as defined by markers within these categories (ARD Consortium, 2005). Failed statehood is word with no official definition yet points to a variety of situational factors. One definition is by the Global Policy Forum (2013) and declares that,

Failed states can no longer perform basic functions such as education, security, or governance, usually due to fractious violence or extreme poverty. Within this power vacuum, people fall victim to competing factions and crime, and sometimes the United Nations or neighboring states intervene to prevent a humanitarian disaster. However, states fail not only because of internal factors. Foreign governments can also knowingly destabilize a state by fueling ethnic warfare or supporting rebel forces, causing it to collapse.

These basic definitions are to varying extents used throughout this paper as a sampling of the current discourse. However, in a truly decentralized state, it would appear that the USAID definition of statehood misses the crucial point of convergence between government and the



governed, wherein all of those governed are more effectively, also the governing themselves. However, this seemingly simple, yet politically radical notion is separated from the level of implementable policy in most internationally-led decentralization projects in the contexts of failed states.

One of the primary goals underpinning the majority of large international endeavors of peacebuilding in fragile states is “stability,” which has come to be defined as almost synonymous with nation-building or even more specifically, “statebuilding.” Statebuilding, as an aspect and function of decentralization, is at once political, fiscal, and administrative in addition to requiring and pushing for authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity (USAID, 2009). The interplay of all of these ideas around statebuilding and decentralization are in many ways the fundamental thrust of this thesis and as such will be referred to continuously throughout the rest of the paper. After this brief introduction on decentralization and statebuilding, the relationship between “failed or fragile states” and international intervention in decentralization will be further unpacked and analyzed.

Decentralization promotes statebuilding in the context of failed states, in that it helps build up a government’s reach, authority, and credibility. These factors all contribute to an overall increase in stability that is noted as one of the main goals in USAID-style decentralization. It gives citizens more avenues to participate in governance which allows for decreases of lapses into conflict and increased pursuit of parliamentarian approaches to dispute resolution. With the addition of citizens’ voices, public services can be more expertly provided through localized wisdom and national support. This means that paradoxically, by giving up forms of direct control (over), a central government or state can increase its overall authority (with) and capacity. Also, decentralization makes a fragile or conflict-affected state less

vulnerable to collapse as the points of decision-making become more disperse, peripheral, and multiplied. This holds true, for instance, in agriculture: when one plant gets sick, the disease can wipe out an entire field if only a single crop is cultivated. However, if the field is diversified, then the disease can be more effectively contained and appropriately and delicately handled because it only spreads to like plants. The mono-crop field is like a centralized government in that if one part of it becomes infected with violent conflict it is easier for the whole thing to become vulnerable to collapse. Decentralization allows for conflict transformation in a similar way by having diverse and diffuse paths for peripheral conflict transformation and authority maintenance. Overall, decentralization can, if effectively, accountably, and carefully processed, lead to and facilitate the growth of a healthy and more effective state which in turn leads to greater democracy and credibility for external investor funding. However, it is important to extricate the intricate motivations of failed state-justified international interventions which are often proliferated through a wide range of structural agendas and liberal economic adjustments.

### *Failed Statehood*

Although pointing at different factors a state may be failing at the same time that it is fragile. Examples of states at one point or another declared (whether erroneously or not) to be “failed states” and “fragile states” are Nepal (1990-2013: all timelines are approximate), Somalia (currently), Afghanistan (1990-2010), Sierra Leone (Currently), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-2010), and Syria (currently); all of which were or are tragically affected by violent conflict which contributed to a lack of both infrastructure and the authority to move forward. Many of these nations have also undergone efforts at decentralization with various degrees of efficacy to counteract the failed state factors of violent conflict. A commonly reflected-upon failed state

index is the one performed by the “Fund For Peace” which lists countries from “very high alert” to “very sustainable.” On this list, the U.S. falls at “very stable” but does not reach the “sustainable” registries (Fund for Peace, 2014). Another system of failed state metrics is provided by USAID and is called “Measuring Fragility: Indicators and Methods for Rating State and Performance (ARD Consortium, 2005).” These metrics are produced with a mind towards programmatic evaluation and come with a variety of indicators which can be implemented alongside development programs.

The term “failed state,” however, is highly contested as it does not effectively illustrate the vastly different circumstances involved in such nations as listed above. For instance, Nepal had a Maoist revolution which is related but different to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan or the long-term fragility of Somalia. In addition, the term “failed state” has to do with the projected legitimacy of a nation and its leadership as it seen by other nations. For example, the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan was not recognized by many global-central powers from their rule as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 due to in part to an, at times Islamophobic, discourse around terrorism and at yet other times due to the cruelty and repression suffered at the hands of the Taliban rule. During this time though other nations such as United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan did consider Afghanistan Taliban regime as legitimate statehood. These differences in outside perception are often reflective of global-central political currency and alliances, even as the designations may point to measurable statistics and methodologies. The phrase “failed state” marks what is considered a legitimate democracy in the eyes of those in a position of power. This position of power is often precisely what enables them to be the arbitrator of such judgements. Therefore, it is no surprise that it is often Western global-central powers who are in a position to determine what is and is not a “legitimate democracy.”

There are examples of the failed state designation that invoke the extremes and contradictions in the failed states matrices yet that do not necessarily diminish the usefulness of what these matrices are trying to do and often accomplishing. For instance, Iranian media and others declared the U.S. to be a failed state during the beginning days of the Ferguson crisis due to its failure to respond adequately and humanely to internal crisis and structural oppression. However, those criticizing and declaring the US to be a failed state are also among those nations that are broadly politically opposed to U.S. foreign affairs (Piven, 2014). As the crisis in Ferguson continues and spreads across the country, even such nations as North Korea have taken stabs declaring the U.S. to be a “graveyard of human rights” (AP, Huffington Post, 2014). I, therefore, use the terms “failed” and “fragile” state, but only inasmuch as they are currencies of discourse, not by way of condoning their inherent legitimacy as qualifying concepts.

#### *Failed Statehood and International Intervention*

The term “failed state” has an increasing relevance in international political discourse as it begins to more and more greatly implore, justify, or invite the use of international intervention that is often at once militaristic, political, and developmental (Bendaña, 2005, p.5) including, or even especially, in zones where decentralization processes are occurring or are perceived as missing by any number of actors. A state designated as a failed state in the current era, especially since Reagan and Bush Jr.’s presidencies in the U.S., has come to often mean U.S. troops are on the way (Chomsky, 2006). Just as quickly as US Troops arrive in an effort to “fight terrorism” or protect homeland security, NATO may take over the military of that failing state while the UN, its governing functions (Chomsky, 2006). While there is certainly truth to the globalized nature of modern conflict and the link between geographically disparate nation’s security, it is

important to also recognize remnants of an old imperialism taking on a neo-liberal and modern coat in the form of neo-liberalism, or economic liberalization through various forms of force. As stated by a Canadian politician Michael Ignatieff and cited by Grubačić in “Don’t Mourn, Balkanize” (2010);

Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan... are laboratories in which a new imperium is taking shape, in which American military power, European money and humanitarian motive have combined to produce a form of imperial rule for a post-imperial age... Bosnia after Dayton offered laboratory conditions in which to experiment with nation-building... the reconstruction of the Balkans has not been an exercise in humanitarian social work, it has always been an imperial project.. because nation-building is the kind of imperialism you get in a human rights era.

This quote referencing an ‘imperial experiment’ as taking place in the former Yugoslavia marks a subtle and apparent trend in global-central involvement in decentralization processes. There is a shift occurring in which overt colonial manipulation of international governance is considered largely unacceptable by many modern citizens, so now there is a change in languaging to couch the interventions in more acceptable, humanitarian neoliberal rhetoric such as “protecting democracy” or “enhancing international economic integration”. This rhetoric and its underlying processes of liberalization often contain potentially useful tools and dangerous threads of political neo-colonization for these peripheral-nations seeking or negotiating with foreign agents in internal decentralization efforts. To clarify, central-national agents are shifting overt colonialism of failed states to more covert methods of control, including via the process of decentralization.

One such example of this shift is the both plausible and manipulated logic that a failed state is a threat to “homeland” or international security, as it creates hotbeds of anti-Western (or central-critical) “terrorism.” The iconic George Bush Jr. quote resonates, “We’re taking the fight to the terrorists abroad so that we don’t have to fight them here at home” (Bush, 2003). This irony of “anticipatory self-defense” has, in all cases, hidden agendas, some more dangerous and contradictory while at the same time acknowledging the plight of security in international relations.

The U.S. double standard in its foreign policy, or “American exceptionalism,” is noteworthy in this case as it itself poses a major threat to international aid and decentralization efforts everywhere, rather than combat it (Arai, Personal Communication, 2014). The term “failed state” itself is often “frustratingly imprecise,” (Chomsky, 2006, p. 3-5) but amongst some of its primary indicators inherent contradictions begin to bloom. One characteristic of a failed state is their, “inability or unwillingness to protect their citizens from violence and perhaps even destruction” (Chomsky, 2006, p.4). Another is their tendency to regard themselves as beyond the reach of domestic or international law, and hence free to carry out aggression and violence (Chomsky, 2006). Even if failed states do have any democratic forms of governance, they suffer from a serious “democratic deficit” that deprives their formal democratic institutions of real substance” (Chomsky, 2006). These indicators reveal the ultimate irony of the US military, economic, and civil society forms of spreading, in this case, “statehood,” but “democracy” or “development” would just as easily fit. The United States has massive amounts of money controlling our “democracy” in addition to the flawed electoral college system, which both appear to be serious “democratic deficits.” Through our corrupted democracy, the US has systematically blocked it’s ability to be internationally tried for war crimes from any of our

evidenced transgressions ranging from Nicaragua to Iraq (Chomsky, 2006). We are “exceptional” in our ability and tendency to deny accountability and second opinions in international politics and involvement. A catchphrase of this American exceptionalism today is Bush Jr.’s quote, “America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country,” (Bush, 2004) and that we don’t need substantive proof in order to because, “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof — the smoking gun — that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud” (Bush, 2002). These quotes among others heralded as ‘decisive,’ supported US involvement in several quagmired conflicts of highly nebulous effect and fractious allegiance from American people. These quotes and the practices they preempted, additionally contributed to international opinion of the U.S. falling an average of about 30% (Pew, 2008). While acknowledging the in-authenticities of the U.S.’s self-styled image as a paragon of successful statehood, human rights achievement, and democracy; it is important to note that this critique does not disacknowledge the differences in level or severity of these factors between centers and peripheries on the global, national, and local scales. The U.S., despite its limits, still has much to offer in terms of international politics, money, and grounded experience; the real question is of methods and tact.

Amongst militarist neoliberal aspects of international statebuilding and nation-building, especially by the U.S., an important question, like cream, rises to the surface: how can decentralization occur from top-down or global-central international intervention if its goal is to promote bottom-up, peripheral, local and domestic, participatory democracy? It seems that instead of sole interest in participatory democratization global-central international actors tend to see, “good state or institutional behavior is defined within neoliberal parameters of how well the State enacts reforms featuring policies to privatize and liberalize. In truth, under neoliberalism,

statebuilding becomes state-dismantling as power is turned over to transnational corporations and to the un-elected bureaucrats of the global institutions such as IMF, World Bank, and WTO, a process of national and state disempowerment” (Bendaña, 2005, p.9). Neoliberal is used in this essay to describe an economic tendency towards increased privatization, reduction of trade sanctions, and opening of local and domestic markets to international corporations in line with the methods and rationale of late free-market capitalism. Within this definition is an embedded critique of the ways in which neoliberal “reforms” are often used to exploit resources from the global periphery by locking them into a system of perpetual debt. Liberal decentralization then fits neatly into a neoliberal package as long as it is in a modified form that supports economic liberalism and foreign interventions because it takes power out of regimes who often hold tightly on closed borders, as was the case in Libya with Gaddafi (Anonymous, Personal Communication, 2014). Furthermore, decentralization that supports foreign political and economic intervention moves international leverage into the intimacies of local markets, which demonstrates a new generation of structural adjustments, geopolitics, militarism, and neo-colonial reach. The interventions described by the above quote from Bendaña, although not talking specifically about decentralization, clarify these relationships.

Often though, the funding and guidance of global-central internationals is needed in a fractured state. However, it seems that as far as statebuilding through decentralization is concerned, it seems necessary, especially for the global South, peripheral nations, and “fragile states” who seek decentralization processes, to come together with non-imperial/independent global allies in some manner of solidarity to share lessons of decentralization in a way that promotes self-sufficiency over imperial tendencies. Then, from this place, nations are more able to negotiate the use of resources with global superpowers from a seat of well-informed choice



rather than desperate necessity. This way, they can leverage the benefits of engagement with international aid agencies, state departments and other government agencies, and NGOs more ideally and with less chance for manipulation of their vulnerability. On the ground, however, idealisms may find little pragmatism.

## **Decentralization and Democracy**

Decentralization, according to USAID, ideally aims to “create more transparent political institutions, inculcate stronger citizen support for government, and improve democratic participation” (2009, p.3-5). By its very nature, decentralization depends on and encourages the creation of inroads for citizen participation in a way that actualizes diverse solutions to problems, from local issues to their larger manifestations. It also offers incentives to in-country civil society at-large in subnational jurisdiction, including many latent groups who would then have greater access to resources and actual avenues for change. Finally, it creates a more robust system by which officials at all levels can learn how to be accountable democratic leaders at local and progressively macro levels. However, “democracy” is a fraught and potentially dangerous piece of languaging and policy in terms of international interventions and the quest for power (Mann, 2005). In decentralization, it is imperative that localizing the government not simply be a Western style experiment in neoliberal market-places and nation-building but rather a context-specific set of dynamic processes and praxis. As is shown by the interviews and research of this thesis, decentralization is always an internal affair, even as negotiation with external actors is often necessary.

Western governance, such as the U.S. national-central governance, fail to meet the needs of incorporating the participatory aspects of native or traditional localized governance within the

US. In places like Oaxaca, Mexico however, indigenous persons have fought and been able to secure the right to elect their officials through their own bottom-up methods. This ongoing struggle for autonomy is a living iteration of decentralized and participatory democracy.

Decentralization is not, ideally, something that the centralized government is deified for granting. However, this is often the case. For example, Musharraf was heralded by international NGOs for his inclusion of women in national decentralization processes in Pakistan, however his incentives were largely to undermine political parties that could possibly undermine his military dictatorship (Samdani, Personal communication, 2014). Democratization through decentralization generally only happens when centralized national governance (and its external motivators) sees a political, and generally financial, incentive for this transfer (Menkhaus, 2014; USAID, 2009, p. 5-6). Authoritarian national leaders tend not to support a great level of localized accountability without substantial higher (global-central) or lower (national and local-peripheral) pressures to change.

External global-central pressures to democratize are usually coupled with militarist and economic pressures from central countries like the United States and pushed through U.S. military presence, NATO, and USAID for a wide variety of reasons that are rarely to never as completely altruistic or neutral as they might bill themselves to be (Bendaña, 2005; Chomsky, 2006; Mann, 2005). This incongruence marks an incredible irony if the goal of decentralization is something as dynamic as bottom-up democracy. It seems as though decentralization, as pursued by USAID and the US Department of Defense, proffers the values of participatory democracy, but only to a certain point. This limit, is the point where support for decentralization towards actual participatory democracy by these forces stops. It tends to be the point at which neoliberal globalization is blocked or where US political interests are thwarted through actual

independent sovereignty of the nation and local agency being aided or pressured. It is ironic however that independent, or even localized sovereignty, is behind many of the claimed goals of decentralization. However, in instances of supreme insecurity, violence, and “democratic deficits,” external global-central military or development assistance is often accepted or sought out by global peripheries even though it almost always comes with ‘strings attached’ (Bendaña, 2005). For this reason, peripheral-nations or locales trying to decentralize and democratize need carefully weigh the delicacies and intricacies of negotiating with global-central powers noting that whenever possible self-reliance, internal grassroots power, or some manner of multi-peripheral nation or independent global allyship solidarity is preferred.

## **Decentralization and Economics**

Although economics and development have been discussed prior to this section, it is necessary to lay out a more equitable addressing of the complexity of goals and outcomes of economic development through decentralization and its relationship with international intervention. A major tension shown by this research into decentralization is that of levels of internally led (whether national-center or national-periphery etc.) versus externally (global-centrally) leveraged decentralization. The second major tension revealed is between “neoliberal” and “progressive” economics in decentralization. This research reflected on “Chart 3,” later in this paper, shows a correlation between local-peripheral, internally-led decentralization with progressive economic reform and global-central, externally-led decentralization with more neoliberal reform. The research shows national-central leadership often falling somewhere in the middle depending on circumstance and context.

*Neoliberalism and Progressive Economics in Decentralization*

Neoliberalism, or globalized and advanced late capitalism, has a fraught history and conflicting patrons and critics that make it both appealing and distrusted by many nations struggling for decentralization. Yet neoliberalism is the prevailing and powerful norm as the current dominant global economic model; as such it is heralded especially by Western global-national style interventions on developing or fragile nations. With patrons such as USAID, World Bank, IMF, United Nations, NATO, etc., neoliberal economic orders have the power of discursive monopoly despite massive critiques from within those countries sought to be empowered through neoliberal reform. Several successes of liberalization and rapid expansion exist as well but are often fraught with in-country problems of divisions of wealth and further marginalization of those without equal access to compete in the “free” market (Albert and Xu, 2014). Examples also exist of middle class expansion in several countries such as China and Brazil (World Bank, 2011, p. 36, which are, at the surface level, the darlings of liberalization despite the fraught consequences of a rapidly expanding middle class such as income inequality, pollution, and rising prices (Albert and Xu, 2014). Although it appears that the socio-economic and political experiment of late-capitalism and other growth-based economies such as state-socialism have failed to return on their promises of economic equality, they have created massive advancement in areas such as medicine through the merits of competition in a neoliberal marketplace. Factors such as this make neoliberal reforms appealing in the short-term to many peripheral and decentralizing nations even if it may lock them into a system of perpetual debt and exploitation from the outset. However, given the example of medicine, capitalism (and multinational investment and trade agreements) is also the culprit behind the massive price hikes of medicine (ABC, 2014) that make those same advancements unavailable to countries facing

structurally racist and predatory economic lending and “aid” coupled with geopolitical intervention (Essex, 2013). These multi-national corporate lending, investment, and resource exploitation drives transform a version of decentralization into a seemingly benign investment that can aid both the process of keeping a peripheral nation peripheral. In other words, these neoliberal methods can allow peripheral to advance but only within a glass-ceilinged and peripheral arena of development.

The culture around semi-veiled neo-colonial aspects, of the often quite well-intentioned international development agencies in the District of Columbia, can be at times hugely stifling or ignorant of these conditions. I was in a meeting with a semi-federal development institution where I was specifically informed that I am not allowed to say the word, “colonialism” and then these agents, representing in many ways the United States in their work abroad, proceeded to make fun of someone who did talk about colonialism in the organization. This organization was World Learning, the larger organization that contains SIT Graduate Institute. This restriction shows a fear and silence around issues that need transparency and massive self-reflexivity, even if they do require a careful tact and subtlety of analysis. The real issue though is the pure unbridled momentum of capitalism and its subsidiary growth-based economics and their tendency towards the creation of violent and high marginalization and necessarily limited democracies (Mann, 2005; Phōtopoulos, 1997, p. 171-175) in addition to the looming shadow of neocolonialism. All of these factors such as marginalization, violence, instability, division of wealth, and limits of democracy run in blatant contradiction to the goals of decentralization that is supported by these same international powers supporting huge neoliberal institutions and interests.

It is, however, important to weigh the institutional learning that these more economically liberal institutions have undergone since the 80's and 90's: the heyday of structural adjustments being put forth as the panacea to development and market integration (Cadwell, 2014). It seems that many of these international development and trade actors such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have undergone massive shifts in priorities or at least in methodologies of liberalization. These shifts include the recognition of need for greater institution-building in order to not massively destabilize and impoverish a developing nation through rapid liberalization (Cadwell, 2014) or more likely, to gain the highest effectiveness in investments.

With this learning curve in mind, it seems that although the goals of economic liberalization have largely remained the same, the methods are adapting. Decentralization then can be seen for its true value to neoliberal economic reform as a transitional and institution-building mechanism that can lend itself to a more stable marketplace in addition to more readiness for integration of international products and services at the local service delivery level (Cadwell, 2014). So with advances in fields such as monitoring and evaluation increasing insight into the programming practicalities, it seems as though organizations such as USAID and its partners are invested in the democratic and governmental reforms in at least as much for the economic liberalization that may more easily happen as a result (Essex, 2013). Even though the consequences of liberalization may be debatable, the amount of money and research that has gone into optimization of USAID programs and the like does lend them credibility in terms of capacity and functionality, which makes them an appealing partner to peripheral-nations choosing decentralization with a dearth of resources and skills.

Many nations are extremely skittish around economic liberalization agents such as the World Bank, so avenues like decentralization mark a shift in tone for USAID and other similar agencies. This shift may allow for greater buy-in from peripheral nations by offering them dividends such as enhanced local service delivery. The underlying motivations for central-international engagement with decentralization processes and peripheral resistances to them also explains a trend of greater neoliberal reform accompanying global-central international engagement with decentralization, as contrasted with periphery tendencies towards more progressive and localized economics. This trend is however internally complex and not monolithic.

#### *Force for Decentralization and Economics*

Many more periphery-led internal initiatives in decentralization tend towards less strictly neoliberal reforms, even though there are exceptions. This trend of exceptions tends to accelerate as the more localized and farther peripheral the locus of decentralization becomes, maximizing in cases like the Zapatistas who are, or at least were, local-peripheries and are strictly anti-capitalist (Saenz, Personal Communication, 2014). Many peripheral nations prefer, for good reason, measures of peripheral solidarity such as can be found in the Brazil- India - China - South Africa (BRICS) network or even more peripheral networks than this (Arai, Personal Communication, 2014). These are efforts at leveraging solidarity and avoiding negotiation with global-centers in order to maintain greater autonomy and self-reliance in navigating global, national, and local nested economics. What's more, there are also less neoliberally aggressive global-center nations that offer aid, in addition to more neutral to

peripherally-aligned agents coming out of peripheral centers, but these agents often have less access to resources than those that are more capitalist.

The pendulum of economic reform swings to the opposite extreme liberalization the more global-center the decentralization efforts leadership is. In nations like Somalia, Sierra Leone, or Liberia (this trend is notably common in Sub-Saharan Africa) global-center interventions in decentralization processes tend to push dramatically towards economic-liberalization. These initiatives are often fraught by the perils of inner and outer fragility (Arai, 2014), hidden motives, and destabilization by spoilers (Anonymous, 2014; Samdani, 2014) in addition lacking internal (domestic) buy-in for decentralization: the culling song of decentralization efforts (Arai, 2014). As stated by Tatsushi Arai, “Decentralization”-- that is, effective and successful decentralization-- “is *always* internally-led” (Personal Communication, 2014), even though on the current landscape of globalized power there are any number of constant ploys, grabs, and forces propelling a given decentralization movement at any moment. Some countries may find that massive neoliberal economic reform is in their best interests, but this tactic has many drawbacks that need be carefully weighed.

### *Patronage Systems, Unitarism, and Decentralization in Economics*

An important distinction to make here is that all nations are not operating under the same initial context and readiness or even desire for democracy, liberalization, or whatever left-socialist alternative. Many authoritarian nations have long-standing cultures and traditions of patronage systems and authoritarian or unitarist national-center leadership that are integrated into their mechanisms of survival and statehood. Authoritarian leaders are often considered unitarist, or highly centralized, and often employ patronage systems, or systems of showing favoritism to



one's supporters through economics and positions of power. Examples such as decentralization as it occurred in China from 1990 to now (Albert and Xu, 2014; Cadwell, 2014; Zhang, 2006) and many nations in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Mozambique (Bendaña, 2005, p. 7; Cadwell, 2014), or even Pakistan under General Musharraf beginning in 1999 (Samdani, 2014) challenge the notion that democratization and decentralization are always useful or correct for any given context because in many contexts, some variation of authoritarianism and patronage systems may be the deeply historical thread keeping an nation stable.

Although authoritarianism is obviously fraught in many ways, externally pushed for decentralization of a unitarist patronage system may not only fail to provide the advances in democracy and service delivery it promises, but may even create greater instability or be used as a tool of geo-political and economic encroachment. Such cases breed more intense distrust of the global-centers in addition to putting the lives of those marginalized in the decentralizing nation in danger. This potential for chaos happens through a paradigmatic global-central and western assumption that democracy or decentralization is 'always good.' Many nations such as Qatar are actually extremely stable with unitarist or authoritarian political structures, although those authoritarian regimes that are stable often coincide with massive wealth or resource control and ownership. Similar topics are addressed in various "strongman" theories in which many nations are actually held together largely because of an authoritarian leader (Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Sautman, 1992). The deep values, cultures, and long-term goals of a nation must be considered when weighing or considering how to, or even whether to, navigate decentralization. This thesis does not go deeply into the connotations of decentralization efforts in potentially inappropriate contexts such as these, but their existence is worth briefly clarifying in order to avoid the notion that decentralization is a panacea.

## Research Findings

This paper now transitions into the heart of the actual analysis and visualization of data collected primarily through grey literature such as programmatic reports, scholarly journals, individual interviews, and books written by those with direct experience with decentralization.

### *Local, National, or International Force Categorization*

From this initial research of interviews, Libya and Somalia held the highest levels of external intervention at +4, then the former Yugoslavia/Balkans <sup>5</sup>at +1, followed by Pakistan and the Bay Area at -1, and the Zapatista Autonomous Zones at -5. In folding case studies, programmatic reports, external research, and comparative analysis into this same paradigm of coding, the progression demonstrated in Chart 1 emerged:

*Chart 1: Location of Decentralization Force Categorization*

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 5 External-Global<br>(most center) | (none)                                  |
| 4                                  | Sierra Leone, Liberia                   |
| 3                                  | Somalia, Rwanda, South Sudan            |
| 2                                  | India, Nepal                            |
| 1                                  | Balkans, Lebanon                        |
| 0 National                         | China, Mexico, United States,           |
| -1                                 | Pakistan, Syria, Bay Area of California |
| -2                                 | Brazil                                  |

<sup>5</sup> Although the situation of the countries internal to the Former Yugoslavia/ Balkan region are far more complex than can be gathered by a single analysis, they are lumped regionally in this study due to the history of this progression, the way they are often treated by external agents, and the affiliations of those interviewed.

|                                       |                             |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| -3                                    | Switzerland, Bolivia        |
| -4                                    | Vermont, Zapatistas, Rojava |
| -5 Internal-local<br>(most periphery) | (none)                      |

Some initial notes on this graph are that no country qualified as 5 or completely external or -5 completely internal. This is likely due to the fact the no country or nation seeking decentralization is fully without internal or external influence. Some other notes are that many of the countries with more internal and locally led decentralization, such as Switzerland, Pakistan, Brazil, Vermont, China, and the United States, have significant access to internal resources and/or money which no doubt contribute to their ability to rely more so internally in whatever degree of decentralization they have pursued. Another point about these geographies is that several of them are not suffering from what is commonly recognized as violent-conflict or active warfare such as Switzerland, Vermont, China, Brazil, and the Bay Area. However these areas were all chosen for specific reasons based on the contributions they have to offer to our understanding of decentralization. The Latin American cluster towards the lower end could also be a result of the so-called, “pink tide” (*marea rosa*) of Latin American resistance to structural adjustments, foreign capitalism, or politically conservative ethos coupled with movements towards the political left after the 1990’s (Chodor, 2014).

#### *Decentralization Level and Efficacy of Process*

After creating the above graph I created another graph outlining in a general way the level and efficacy of decentralization processes. Finally, these two initial graphs are combined to make a rough comparison of force categorization and level/efficacy. The categories covering

level and efficacy of decentralizations goals are participatory governance, state strength, peripheral empowerment, development, and government transparency and accountability, as rated by levels of significance of change before and after decentralization.<sup>6</sup> Participatory governance looks at such issues as local elections, town councils, and the effect of such factors on national politics. State strength looks at how strong the state is, with a somewhat neutral definition of statehood as being the strength and capacity of government to act on behalf of and serve its territories and citizens. Peripheral empowerment looks at such aspects as civil society, minority and rural involvement, federalism, and community group strength. Development looks at standard economic development markers such as gross domestic product (GDP). Government transparency and accountability looks at such issues as level of elite capture<sup>7</sup> and successful transparency and accountability models of national central and peripheral governance.

*Chart 2: Decentralization Level and Efficacy of Process*

|                          | Not Significantly (+0)                              | Somewhat Significant (+1)  | Significant (+2)   | Very Significant (+3)                    |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Participatory Governance | Liberia, Somalia, South Sudan, China, Mexico, Syria | Sierra Leone, Rwanda, India, Bay Area, Lebanon, United States, Brazil, | Nepal, Pakistan, Bolivia, Balkans  | Switzerland, Vermont, Zapatistas, Rojava |
| State Strength           | Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Rojava   | Liberia, India, Nepal, Mexico, Bolivia, Zapatistas, Balkans            | Rwanda, Bay Area, China, United States, Pakistan, Vermont, Lebanon, Brazil | Switzerland                              |

<sup>6</sup> Human rights and mitigation of violence indicators would also have been useful corollaries but are harder to disaggregate in terms of solely decentralization created factors.

<sup>7</sup> Elite capture is the transfer of corruption through local governance through decentralization. It happens when, local elites such as warlords and drug traffickers seize political positions in local governance through manipulation or local sway in a decentralization process.

|  |  |  |  |                             |
|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Peripheral Empowerment                     | Sierra Leone   | Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Mexico, Balkans, Syria, Brazil, Vermont, India, China | Bay Area, Lebanon, United States, Pakistan, Switzerland, Nepal | Bolivia, Zapatistas, Rojava |
| Development                                | Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Mexico, Syria, Rojava                     | Somalia, Nepal, Lebanon, Pakistan, Bolivia, Zapatistas, Liberia, Balkans                     | Rwanda, Bay Area, United States, Brazil, Vermont, Switzerland  | India, China                |
| Government Transparency and Accountability | Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Mexico, Pakistan, Syria | Rwanda, India, Bay Area, Lebanon, China, United States, Brazil, Bolivia, Nepal, Balkans      | Switzerland  | Vermont, Zapatistas, Rojava |

Some important notes from chart 2, is that many of these countries that scored very low are still in violent conflict such as South Sudan and Syria. In these situations, the ability to decentralize is almost completely frustrated even though decentralization is known for minimizing conflict (Arai, 2014). Additionally, wealthy and non-warring nations such as Switzerland notably score higher no doubt due to their relative stability and position of privilege.

Some other noteworthy factors are that places like the Zapatista territories and Rojava score very high on Transparency and Accountability, Peripheral Empowerment, and Participatory Governance while darting back to the other end of the spectrum on issues such as State Strength and Development. In the words of Charlotte Saenz (2014) on this very topic;

What is considered development? Wealth, development, jobs, income. These are the ways the developed world measures success. Economic affluence is wealth....These are markers of

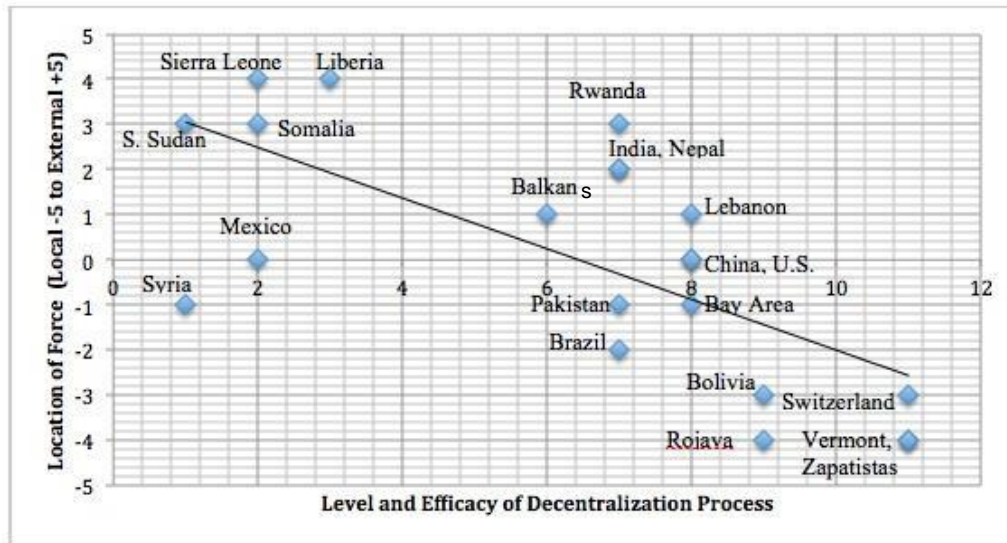
international measures of success. The Zapatistas have different markers. They exist in different geographies and time. By some peoples' eyes... people may say there's still a lot of poverty, but it depends on what you consider to be poverty. There's no money for gadgets.... In that way they're still as poor as ever. But maybe there are other things that aren't as easily measured like, time to spend with daughters, basketball with the whole village every day, the kind of community relations and connections, the ability to organize that communities have, children going to school, the quality of their learning. Some things might be measured and recognized by the outside world, like girls in schools and literacy. But often I think it's very frustrating for people with development markers to see what I see as tremendous accomplishments. I wouldn't even call it progress. Really, it's another world entirely.. with other values and other markers. It's very hard for the outside world to evaluate or even see or understand that.

In Charlotte's perspective, from her work with Zapatista communities, they have different goals entirely. It is worthwhile to note these differing development and "progress" goals in determining the strength of a decentralization process and its lessons for others.

### *Decentralization Location of Force and Efficacy*

The next chart represents the data collected to locate the levels of force for decentralization, correlated against the level and efficacy of the process of decentralization.

Chart 3: Location of Force and Level of Efficacy of Decentralization Process



As you can see from the line of best fit (a statistical average), there is a correlation between greater external force and a lower efficacy of decentralization and vice versa. The quote of my interviewee and high level practitioner Tatsushi Arai stating that, “There is no such thing as externally-led decentralization” appears to hold statistical water. The more locally and peripherally, and as such internally, led the decentralization process, the greater its overall level and efficacy-- thus the closer the decentralization efforts get to actually decentralizing.

A couple notable outliers to the overall trends on this graph are Mexico and Syria. Mexico attempted decentralization in the mid 80’s and through the present with a variety of different methods including fiscal, political, and administrative attempted adjustments. A possible reason for the Mexican failure to decentralize in is that “the basic political incentives for decentralization were misaligned... the particular features of democratic institutions and processes in Mexico have become important stumbling blocks rather than promoters of an efficient and equitable decentralization process... [and] the Mexican political systems do not allow for comprehensive reform of fiscal federalism” (Diaz-Cayeros, Gonzalez, and Rojas,

2002). This means that money got corrupted and disturbed the decentralization path due to differences in the stated and actual goals of decentralizing. Charlotte Saenz, clarifies this disjunction between Mexican stated goals and their underlying economic motivations by saying, “Mexico has been a failed state for a long time” if “the state’s job is providing public goods or defending a sense of social good,” but, if the state’s job is to, “uphold elite interests and capitalism” and to be, “an executor of multi-national interests, then it’s a very successful state” (Personal Communications, 2014). Syria is in the midst of a protracted and incredibly violent conflict between multiple in-country coalitions and a wide swath of international supporters creating a proxy without a clear end in sight. On Syria as an outlier, despite the fact that there are massive external military and aid forces present in Syria, many of whom, such as the US, are supporting decentralization, the largest force for decentralization its highly diverse internal rebellions and coalitions forming the opposition to the regime. That being said, if Syria maintains a successful ceasefire, the odds are likely that decentralization will switch it into a more-externally led process as the security situation improves for INGO’s and the like. Ongoing warfare and unpredictable situation on the ground both stymie decentralization efforts inside of Syria and prevent more international involvement on the ground thus contributing to Syria’s position as an outlier on this graph.

### *Extrapolation of Meaning*

Although there is clearly a trend between local-leadership forces for decentralization and overall decentralization efficacy, real-life situations hold a more tangled landscape than what a simplified graph can entail. For example, clearly a decentralization effort that is locally- and peripherally-led, in addition to being bottom-up, stands the best chance of success because that is



what decentralization essentially is: local leadership from the bottom-up. However, in real-life situations and with the complete destruction of viable options that warfare often entails, top-down decentralization is by far the most common scenario. Additionally, despite correlations found between internal force and overall success, it seems that the true determinant of successful decentralization is internal acceptance and willingness of this change. With this acceptance, external external force is rendered in some ways less important, but without this internal acceptance, no amount of aid or external force could create the desired outcome of successful decentralization.

Whether a top-down approach is coming from national or global-central forces, there is almost always a political and financial incentive that disturbs the path of decentralization. For example, beginning in 1999, the military dictatorship of General Musharraf in Pakistan, pushed for decentralization at a massive level mainly to undermine party power and maintain the dictatorship (Samdani, 2014). So even though the decentralization process was largely successful in its ability to include local leadership and women in the processes of governance, its illegitimate leadership simply ended up institutionalizing corruption and “elite capture,” or, the political reification of corrupt local leadership. A decentralized dictatorship is far from the American or Western ideal of democracy, but it is important to recognize their successes as well as its failures.

Another noticeable trend is that the most locally-led and decentralized initiatives, such as the Zapatistas, Rojava movement, and Vermont, generally have a comparatively smaller and less diverse population than the larger examples of decentralization efforts. For example although there are at least 5 distinct ethno-linguistic communities within the Zapatista autonomous zones, they largely have strong Mayan and Mexican heritage throughout. Similarly, Vermont is one of

the least racially diverse states in the United States and the Rojava community is entirely Kurdish. This lack of diversity in no way diminishes the importance of their accomplishments but leads us to the question, “How can we generalize their successes onto a larger and more diverse population?” The risk of staggering bureaucracy and loss of centralized power that comes with decentralizing an entire nation seems to encourage the trend in post-violent conflict and ongoing warfare central government to maintain a tight and centralized grip on authority, even if that means sacrificing human rights and democracy along the way. Decentralization is the shift from something centralized to something decentralized, and, in large part, Vermont, Rojava, and the Zapatistas were closer to cultures that were already largely decentralized positing this right to be decentralized to a higher authority such as the United States, the Syrian Regime, or the Mexican government. Their experience and wisdom makes students of the rest of us but is not without complexity of application.

A third and perhaps most crucial element of the research findings is that although external leadership may corrupt or diminish self-reliance in decentralization efforts, it is, in many cases, still absolutely necessary to negotiate with global-central power. In a nation devastated by warfare, it is rare that the control of resources and functional organization necessary will be present at the state level in a way that could allow for massive, or even minimal decentralization. For these reasons, external aid, security measures (such as military and police involvement), and accountability mechanisms offered by global-central agents are often incentives for taking neoliberal structural tradeoffs that nations know all too well are risky. In Rwanda, the Gaccaca system of local and indigenous tribunals, may have localized and enhanced the efficiency of trying the countless crimes of the genocide of 1994, but they could not have afforded or organized this integration of their broken justice system without external aid and leadership, even

though the process itself was traditional (Petersen, Samset, & Wang, 2009). Because of the infrastructure collapse, death toll, and massive culpability across the nation the country needed external support to run these traditional processes.

It is important for peripheral agents to remember in seeking external aid that the combination of external aid and internal motives can contradict in ways that lead to ongoing conflict. In Somalia, internal (domestic) and external (international) fragility coupled with differing motives and spoilers<sup>8</sup>, have led to a consistently failed state (Arai, 2014; Little, 2003) wherein even though local systems of service delivery and justice continue to exist, they are not largely sanctioned or controlled national-central Somali government due to a vacuum of leadership and a dearth of stability. For this reason, Somalia is in a situation in which internal and external actors are profiting off of the instability. In cases such as this where state presence in citizen lives is minimal, decentralization is often just a human attempt at survival rather than a politically organized effort at reform (Little, 2003). The example from above about Pakistan, however, shows that if decentralization efforts are too internal in an already corrupt system, the lack of external accountability may fail to challenge the status quo and simply institutionalize corruption. These two examples begin to show the fine line between too much and not enough external (international) involvement in a decentralization process.

To cite another example, despite Libya's massive oil wealth, external military and foreign aid were important factors in ending the war but, after the Gaddafi's fall in 2011, internationals largely left and began trying to cut economic deals and distributing very Western forms of democratic propaganda in the form of fliers and the like. At first these interventions were

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<sup>8</sup> A spoiler is a person or group of people that benefit from disrupting a process of development, state-building, and democratization.

welcome by many but later began to feel very foreign and not at all rooted in Libyan democratic ideals or experiences on the ground (Anonymous, Personal Communication, 2014).

In some ways similar to the case of Libya is that of Lebanon, wherein decentralization efforts were very effective at promoting service delivery due to a combination of an international foresight to engage local organizations directly and the Lebanese government's allowance of international organizations to fund the local NGO's directly. Through international funding, local agencies were able to facilitate and actualize their own skills and contextual knowledge to create an exceptionally successful post-war reconstruction process without the blundering misunderstanding of external actors trying to control or impose foreign values onto them. However, the Lebanese government and external aid bodies failed to adequately address the period of aid withdrawal. Once the funders left, governmental and self-funding of these now highly-trained local agencies was utterly insufficient. The local agencies then largely and suddenly collapsed due to inability to fund activities following the aid withdrawal. In this case, external aid was very helpful, but the suddenness and failure to address an adequate exit strategy provoked unexpected obstacles (Dabo et al., 2010; El-Mikaway and Melim-McLeod, 2010).

Also of particular interest is the Former Yugoslavia/ Balkan region. The European Union (EU) was a huge source of funding and had interests in decentralization, if not Balkanization<sup>9</sup>, of the former Yugoslavia. This geographic area is tricky to define because internal and highly participatory Balkan federations and systems of horizontal and multi-ethnic federations did struggle to maintain localized power, but were largely overrun by the economic and military power of the U.S., NATO, and the EU in determining the fate of Balkan governance (Coletti, 2011; Grubačić, 2010 and 2011). External global-central aid and force protected and supported

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<sup>9</sup> Balkanization was formerly a pejorative term used to describe the breakdown of nations into smaller and often volatile states however some have reclaimed this term.

only those who fit the “European Model” of decentralization (an economically liberal and more top-down model) but these international interventions did to some extent ward off the dangers of ethno-nationalism that contributed to producing communal violence. However, some argue that they contributed to these destabilizing ethno-nationalisms in the first place. As Andrej Grubačić (2010) described, the real threat to the achievement of Balkan style bottom-up politics was not only global-center agents but also national top-down power brokers who promoted dangerous ideologies and corrupt practices. So the successes of the European Model of decentralization in the Balkans can be attributed in part to external and top-down interventions; however, these successes came at the expense of the potential of the internal, bottom-up processes of Balkan citizens who have long been critical to neoliberal and neocolonial European interventions. Decentralization efforts in the former Yugoslavia, including the so-called Balkanization, produced myriad effects many of which were stabilizing, but yet many others were repressive of more bottom-up styles of Balkan democracy.

The case studies, interviews, and other sources used in compiling this research form a window into decentralization as a generalizable process however, in reality decentralization is so context dependent that a far more robust sample size and research team would be needed in order to create more statistically significant research. This capstone sets the stage for the possibility of a much needed, more thoroughgoing dive into the lessons learned and possibilities inherent in decentralization.

All of the examples from this research just begin to scratch the surface of the complexities facing war-torn nations seeking to decentralize and trying to determine what level of external involvement is acceptable. In summary, this research posits that external involvement should be, whenever possible, avoided in decentralization efforts in favor of self-reliance and

peripheral/local leadership or when those are not possible, through networks of global-South or peripheral solidarity. However, many concessions are necessary in the face of massive violence and that, in some cases, external involvement and leadership may in fact be useful.

## **Conclusion**

This research project is not intended to outline the successes and failures of decentralization efforts but rather to analyze the links between central and peripheral forces at various levels on decentralization processes. Decentralization efforts must have strong national-peripheral buy-in in order to achieve a modicum of success; however, extranational actors can sometimes contribute to the capacity, transparency, and accountability necessary to transitioning a highly centralized nation into a more localized government model. In times of violent conflict, when capacity, transparency and accountability are undermined, a peripheral nation must make critical decisions about how and at what level it interacts with global-central power. A decentralizing nation must prioritize and participate directly with people in the periphery of its society despite national-central agent's tendencies to move in a top-down manner. While strong, centralized statehood and neoliberal reform have important value, they are not the only options available. We can also learn from actors in the fringes about how to create practical alternatives that can create true good governance, alternative modes of sustainable development, decentralized power, and horizontalism amidst a solidarity of peripheral agents. Through peripheral-solidarity and local-sovereignty, people at every level of society can take a more active role in how they are governed, and in turn how they are governing each other. This paradigmatic shift offers a glimpse of a possible future where all persons are respected equally by their state because they comprise their state.

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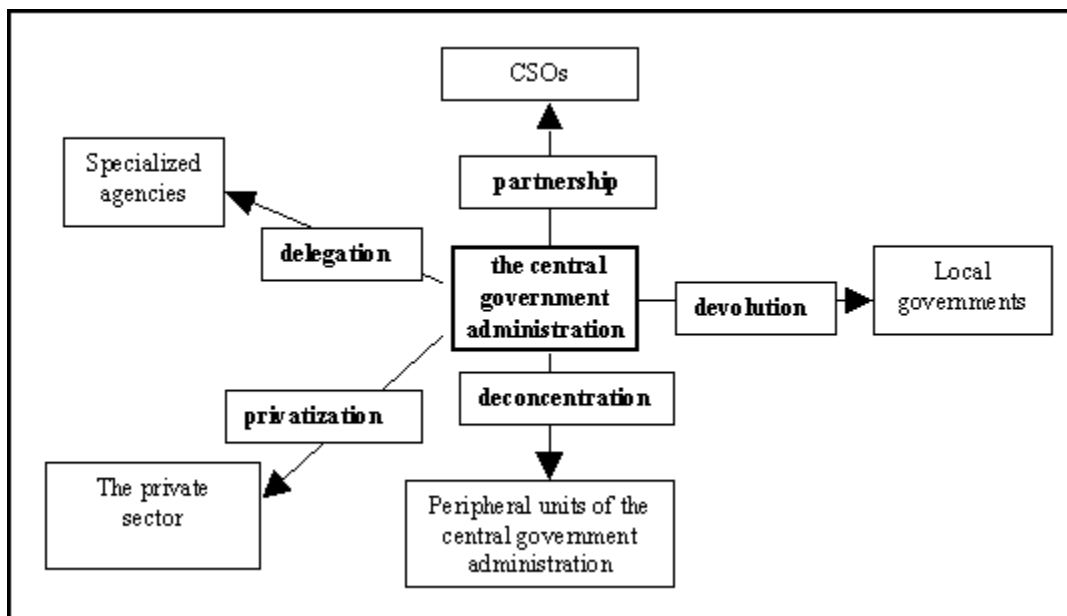
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## Annex 1- A Short Guide to Decentralization in Violent Conflict Zones

By Emmi Bevensee

- **Decentralization** is the process of power transfer of fiscal, political, and administrative duties from higher and more centralized entities to lower and more localized divisions.
  - Examples include:
    - A dictator's duties are transferred to several regional leaders after a revolution.
    - A state government increases the power of local government to make decisions and collect taxes.
    - A business CEO delegates her duties to interns.
- **Types of Decentralization**
  - **Deconcentration** involves, "national government reassigning responsibilities to the field offices of national ministries without placing these offices under the control of subnational governments."
  - **Delegation** reassigns, "responsibility for specifically defined functions to subnational governments or administrative unit."
  - **Devolution** requires "subnational governments to hold defined spheres of autonomous action, which typically means the use of subnational elections."
    - (USAID, 2009)
  - **Privatization** is a more neoliberal approach to decentralization.
  - **Partnership** involves formal civil society consulting mechanisms.
    - <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y2006e/y2006e05.htm>



- **Areas of Decentralization**
  - **Political** decentralization shifts political authority to subnational governments.
  - **Fiscal** decentralization is the enlarging of revenues and expenditures for subnational governments and administrative units
  - **Administrative** decentralization shifts the responsibility and management of public functions from centralized national government into subnational units

- (USAID, 2009)
- **Why Decentralize?**
  - **Minority rights**
    - Localized voting reform increases minority representation and power
  - **Peacebuilding**
    - Local governance is better able to address the basic human needs of its populace so there is less cause for warfare or more context-specific means of addressing conflict when it does come up.
  - **Democratization**
    - Local governments are more democratically elected and thus better represent the populace of each individual province.
  - **Statebuilding**
    - State strength is increased through improved democracy and reach into contested or rural territories
  - **Development**
    - Aids in service delivery through better recognition of unique local contexts and needs
    - Creates greater stability which brings in more external aid and investment
  - **Federalism and Autonomy<sup>10</sup>**
    - Decentralization can sometimes work in tandem with movements for federalism or autonomy to grant greater freedoms or strength of identity to particular regions or populations.
    - Examples
      - Decentralization movements help to increase the autonomy of native persons or to integrate them into a larger political system
      - Decentralization helps to create a federal system to best represent diverse ethnic, linguistic, or religious communities contained in one overarching state.
- **Difficulties in Decentralization**
  - **"Elite Capture"**
    - This is when local elites seize power over local government positions, which undermines true representation of local or marginalized communities. This is especially problematic if these elites are for example, extremist warlords or important figures in drug cartels.
    - Transparency and accountability mechanisms such as local recall systems are the most powerful weapons against elite capture.
  - **Capacity**

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<sup>10</sup> Federalism is a political system where some degree of constitutional autonomy is granted to individual parts of a larger state.

- For example:
  - The Cantons of Switzerland
  - The United States of America

- Decentralization requires not only a lot of money, but also a lot of time, and increases in skillsets. Many governments, especially those in the midst of violent warfare, rarely have the capacity to implement these changes in a meaningful and sustainable way.
  - **Instability**
    - In a country plagued by violent conflict, the resulting leadership voids and infrastructure collapse make the practical implementation of decentralization exceptionally difficult. Ways to address this are feeder mechanisms that work to train people at various levels of government.
  - **Culture**
    - Differing cultural modes are more or less open to decentralization. In cultures that highly value a central leader, it is much more difficult to generate the political and social will needed to decentralize.
  - **Divisiveness**
    - In certain situations decentralization, especially through forms of federalism, can further divide communities it seeks to represent.
      - For example, say a country experiencing ethnic violence creates districts based on ethnicity to increase representation of minority groups. This can inadvertently lead to greater division of the ethnic groups and even create an impetus for violence if there are people who have long since lived in an area where they are not the majority ethnic group and are forced to relocate.
- **Research Findings**
  - Decentralization cannot occur without internal buy-in from a nation.
  - The more peripherally inclusive and bottom-up a decentralization process is, the more likely it is to be successful but top-down force is often also needed.
  - Everyone involved usually has different, or even competing motivations to decentralize.
  - External intervention or support is often needed in nations with violent conflict
  - This external intervention or support often comes with strings attached
  - When external support is needed it is usually best to seek global south solidarity networks, national self-reliance, or neutral/south aligned agents from within nations in the center of global Capitalism
- **Organizing for Decentralization**
  - **Mobilize**
    - Build a working group, collective, or join an organization already working towards decentralization
    - Practice using decentralized modes of organizing within your working group or community to build experience
      - Consensus based decision-making, referendums, dispersed authority, service leadership, participatory democracy, horizontal governance, etc.
  - **Envision your community decentralized**
  - **Identify the needs for decentralization**
  - **Research the current local government systems**
  - **Map**
    - Allies

- Stakeholders
  - Obstacles
  - Key policies
  - Conflict Analysis
  - **Determine course of advocacy**
    - Practices strategies for advocacy
      - Confrontational
        - Protests, Boycotts, direct action, etc.
      - Constructive
        - Meetings with key policy makers, voting, pushing legislation
  - **Practice messaging**
    - **Clear**
    - **Concise**
    - **Compelling**
    - **Practical**
      - Make sure to cite exact numbers, percentages, deadlines, policies, processes, and individuals by name.
  - **Advocate for Decentralization!**
  - **Monitor and Evaluate**
    - Have indicators ready to track how successful your strategies have been and adjust them accordingly.
- **Potential Training Activity**
  - **Bridge Building Activity**
    - **Build a bridge in 10 minutes**
      - Your bridge will be tested for structural integrity by the opposing team.
    - **2 teams**
      - **Authoritarian team**
        - Supreme leader orders all activity
        - Nothing done without their approval
      - **Anarchist team**
        - No hierarchy or leaders
        - Everything done by consensus
        - Can be organized or delegated just must be participatory
  - **Discussion**
    - What was that like?
    - How did it feel?
    - Who won?
    - What worked and what was difficult?
    - Which is "better", central or diffuse leadership?
    - Decentralization tensions
    - Why do they work differently?