Decentralisation, Peace making, and Conflict Management: from Regionalism to Municipalism

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Abstract

This article discusses and reviews the role of decentralisation in peace making and conflict management processes. In the paper, we argue that decentralisation as devolution plays an ambiguous role in such processes. In some cases, decentralisation may provide opportunities for peace and conflict management due to being an instrument of power sharing, while in other cases such sharing of power may ignite further conflict. Examples from armed conflicts in African countries are used to illustrate this ambiguity.

In order for decentralisation to lead to peace making and conflict management, we argue that an interdependent central-local relationship is crucial. Such a relationship entails that the state devolves powers and resources and at the same time ensures fiscal equity between local government areas and that local governments are accountable.

Moreover, we argue that there is a tendency in African countries which have been in processes of peace making and conflict management where decentralisation has been introduced that there is a move from regionalism to municipalism. This move is in some cases applied by central government authorities as a strategy of cooptation, because by transferring power to the local level, regional authorities are enforced to split and act at lower levels of government.

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1 Introduction

Looking mainly into sub-Saharan African countries, this paper will address four stages of internal

conflict and peace:

1. Conflict formation.

2. Armed conflict (civil war)

3. Peace making

4. Conflict management

The emphasis will be on peace making and conflict management. There are several and

overlapping definitions of the concepts of peace making and conflict management. We use UN's

definition of peace making as "the use of diplomatic means to persuade parties in a conflict to

cease hostilities and to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the dispute"[2]. Peace making is thus the

immediate process from cease fire to the implementation of a peace agreement. Whether peace

making includes post-conflict elections, drawing up of a new constitution, or presence and

withdrawal of international peacekeeping troops, is all decided by the contents of the peace

agreement.

Conflict management can be defined as "designing appropriate institutions that structure and

guide the existing conflicts in such a way that all conflict parties can be accommodated"[3] or,

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[2] Annan quoted in Aning,Kwesi, Prosper Addo, Emma Birikorang and Emmanuel Sowatey, *African Commitments to Conflict Prevention and peacemaking. A review of Eight NEPAD countries (*Cape Town/Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, Human Security Initiative*, 2004), p.12.

[3] Schelnberger, Anna Katharina , "Decentralisation as a Means of Conflict Management: A Case Study of Kibaale District, Uganda", *IEE working papers*, 181 (Ruhr University, Bochum: Institute of Development Research and Development Policy,2005), p. 8

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more generally, as "the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence"[4]. When these activities are linked to a long-term project of building peace, we suggest that peace making has been superseded by conflict management.

The aim of this paper is to document the centrality of the interior-territorial dimension of conflict and peace[5]. The territorial dimension particularly refers to the centre – periphery relations within a given territory (e.g. a nation-state with internationally recognised borders). **Decentralisation** is a state strategy to restructure the centre-periphery, or central-local, relations. It can be defined as the transfer of tasks and public authority from the national level to any public agency at the sub-national level[6]. Thus, decentralisation is inherently territorial. There are many types of decentralisation, depending on the scope of authority transferred and the character of the sub-national institutions on the receiving end. When using the term, we refer to integrated and political decentralisation: a wide range of tasks and authority spanning multiple sectors are transferred, and the local institutions are based on political representation and have a territorially restricted mandate[7]. A key question when examining a particular state of decentralisation is to assess the extent of central control and local autonomy.

It seems to be appropriate to combine three approaches to study the territorial dimension of conflict and peace: First, a political geography approach. It addresses the structural-spatial

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[4] Harris, P and Ben Reilly: *Democracy and Deep-rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators* (Stockholm: International IDEA handbook. http://www.idea.int,, 1998), p 18.

[5] The examples illustrating the argument of the importance of the territorial dimension are by no means intended to give account of all features of the conflict situations.
[6] Eriksen, Stein Sundstøl , Jon Naustdalslid and Arild Schou, "Local Government and the Politics of Decentralisation in Four African Countries, Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Botswana". *NIBR Pluss-series,* 4 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, 1999), p 14.

[7] Eriksen et al, "Local Government and the Politics of Decentralisation", pp.36-38.

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dimensions of conflict and peace. Second, a political economy approach. It focuses on the struggle for power and resources, and may explain the escalation and militarisation of conflict (as well as demilitarisation and peaceful handling of conflict). Third, a politics of identity approach. It considers how particularly 'territorial' identities (e.g. nationalism, regionalism, tribalism) are used in the politics of conflict and peace.

The challenge is to grasp the multiple dimensions of the processes, in particular the dynamics in the way the dimensions are socially constructed and interconnected. They have to be assessed in various sequences of conflict and peace within their proper contexts. Reducing civil war to one type of causes, or even to one type of universal behaviour like in the 'greed'-model, does not make sense. A case-oriented strategy is needed in order to learn which strategies produce which outcomes under which circumstances. However, this does not exclude approaches that focus on one particular dimension, like the 'territorial', as long as the contextual and multi-dimensional dynamics are recognised.

Focussing on the territorial dimension and following the course of a conflict in this paper, we start out with introducing and discussing conflict formation with regards to the territorial dimension. Then, we continue the discussion in relation to armed conflict, shedding light on the various aspects that the interior-territorial dimension brings about in conflicts. From armed conflict, we turn to the role of the dimension in peacemaking and conflict management, stating that the interior-territorial dimension plays an ambiguous role in such processes. Lastly, we argue that it is possible to further and identify different impacts of different decentralisation strategies if we separate between regionalism and municipalism. Making this separation, we present and discuss African cases, which show different strategies.

2 Conflict formation

In every modern nation-state, politics has a territorial conflict dimension[8]. Nation-state politics is about different factions of citizens competing for state power, i.e. the sovereign control of a territory within certain internationally recognised borders. The state controls and redistributes important resources. The nation-state usually creates a geographical centre for the concentration of state power and state resources – a capital. Once there is a centre there are peripheries. The centre-periphery relations become vital aspects of the political, administrative, social (class) and economic structures of a country. Modern politics deals not only with power and resources, but also with people's identities. Political actors fighting for state power may use any peripheral part of the territory as base for their popular mobilisation.

Unequal exchange between the centre and periphery, as well as unfair distribution of state resources between the regions, tends to lay claims for political groups with a particular regional support base. From this perspective, the territorial dimension adds considerably to the *'grievance'* theory of conflict formation. Grievance is usually operationalised in terms of economic inequality, political repression, and lack of democracy[9].

According to Nelson Shafir [10] most scholars see civil conflicts as a consequence of "social grievances". David Keen combines political and economic grievances to explain conflict escalation. He believes that exploited groups outside the state are used by the groups that have

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[8] Rokkan, S. N. and S. N. Eisenstadt, *Building States and Nations*. (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1973).

[9] Collier, Paul and Ankie Hoeffler (2004): "Greed and Grievance in Civil war" *Oxford Economic Papers* 5 (4) (2004), pp. 563-595.

[10] Shafir, Nelson, "Domestic Anarchy, Security Dilemmas, and Violent Predation", in Rotberg, Robert I (ed.): *When States Fail. Causes and Consequences.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 53.

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access to the state. Grievance and rebellion is created within these exploited groups[11]. Ethnic,

linguistic, religious and other identities may overlap and stimulate regionally based grievances.

Ethnic concerns may become politicised when centre-periphery and inter-regional relations

become disputed issues.

In a number of African armed conflicts the territorial dimension has been present through claims

for territorial autonomy. According to Forrest[12], demands for territorial autonomy have increased

in African countries. However, even though several groups fight for territorial autonomy, they

have "specific regional goals" and may thus not seek full secession from a nation state[13]. There

are four explanatory factors to the increasing presence of a territorial dimension in African

conflicts:

1) "history of state intervention and (…)manipulation of regional affairs"

2) "long-term economic inequities" (persisting from the colonial period)

3) "individuals' conscious or ascriptive adherence to ethnic or regional identity patterns"

4)"the instrumentalist leadership of movement elites"[14]

Moreover, Forrest[15] argues that reasons for the augmentation of regional movements in Africa are

among others the "retraditionalization of political power" which has "contributed to a

"synchronization between movements and their social context".

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[11] Keen, David, "Incentives and disincentives for violence", in Berdal, Mats and Malone, *Greed and grievance. Economic Agendas in Civil wars.* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000),p 32.

[12] Forrest, Joshua B., "The Rise of Subnationalism in Africa", in Forrest, Joshua *Subnationalism in Africa. Ethnicity, Alliances, and Politics,* (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

[13] Forrest, "The rise of sub-nationalism", p. 5.
[14] Forrest, "The rise of subnationalism", p 236.

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The Katanga region in DRCongo is used to illustrate his argument. This region has formed and promoted its regional identity through building a political alliance between various ethnic groups, while at the same time legitimising their claims on the basis of the pre-colonial Lunda polity[16]. Forrest argues that this example demonstrates a tendency within several African countries in which re-traditionalization through revived local political structures (chiefs, councils) is coupled to sub-national movements, and that the revitalisation of the old power structures is likely to persist and provide the sub-national movements with legitimacy in the years to come[17]

Other more recent examples are South Sudan, North Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. In the case of Uganda, the conflict between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has a territorial dimension, because the LRA have their power base in the Northern part of the country. There has been a North-South divide since colonial times in terms of economic disparities between the cash-crop growing Southern regions and the Northern part which functioned as a "labour reserve" for the Southern plantations and industry[18] . Also, the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has a territorial dimension in the rebel groups being based in the Northern part of the country, and the economic division between the Northern and the Southern part is a cause of conflict.

3 Armed conflict

As Clausewitz noted, war is the continuation of politics by other means. This is particularly true for modern civil wars. Sometimes the political struggle – efforts to take over or keep state power - transcends peaceful and constitutional forms. A militarisation of national politics takes place.

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[15] Forrest, "The rise of subnationalism", p 237.
[16] Forrest, "The rise of subnationalism", p. 106
[17] Forrest, "The rise of subnationalism", p. 216

[18] Atingi-Edo, Michael and Rachel Kaggwa Sebudde, "Entrenching Peace in Post-conflict Economies: The case of Uganda", in Fosu, Augustin Kwasi and Paul Collier *Post-conflict Economies in Africa*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.171-172.

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Grievance motivates violence, because of "the immediate sensation of power and reversal of perceived injustice that violence seemed to offer"[19]. When, and under which conditions, should be a key research concern.

Structurally, a combination of corruption of state power - characterised by increased personalisation of power and 'businessfication' of politics – is suggested to interact with financial crisis and external donor calls for a 'leaner government', causing the shrinkage of the state. The result is "the retreat of the state" – the state literally withdraws from many sectors and regions of the territory, and this creates a turning point – a point of no return to peaceful politics[20]. The situation in which the state looses its authority is often described by a "tipping model" in which there is a "qualitative change in state institutions" which leads to the collapse of their authority[21]. After studying the cases of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zaire And Nigeria, William Reno[22] finds that "….less government has contributed, not to better government, but rather to warlord politics".

Every civil war has a territorial dimension. The logic of war makes the parties operate with a hierarchy of territories, with assumptions of different degrees of own control. War is about weakening (undermining, destroying) the territorial control of the enemy. One war faction may start with control of a small piece of a nation-state territory and end up with the control of the whole country, and visa versa, or be completely defeated.

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[19] Keen, David, "Since I am a dog, Beware my fangs": Beyond a 'rational violence' framework in the Sierra Leonean war". *Working paper*. http://www. no 14 (London: Crisis States Project, LSE, 2002), http://www.crisisstates.com/Publications/wp/working.htm, p. 4.

[20]) Braathen, Einar, Morten Bøås and Gjermund Sæther, "Ethnicity Kills? Social Struggles for Power, Resources and Identities in the Neopatrimonial State", chapter 1 in Braathen, Bøås, & Sæther (eds.), *Ethnicity Kills? The Politics of War, Peace and Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Macmillan:London, 2000), pp. 3-22.

[21] Shafir, "Domestic Anarchy", p. 57
[22] Reno, William, *Warlord Politics and the African States. (*Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p 1.

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There are two particularly complex issues debated to explain the outbreak and perpetuation of civil wars: the roles of warlordism and ethnicity, respectively.

As to warlordism, the discussion is whether the warlords should be seen as 'political-military leaders' driven by 'grievance' or, alternatively, as armed economic 'entrepreneurs' driven by 'greed'. Collier et al.[23] find on the basis of large-scale econometric analyses that actors are primarily driven by greed – i.e. the pursuit of the economic benefits gained in war. They support Mats Berdal and David Malone[24] that the struggle for the control of natural resources – oil, diamonds- is the main driver of civil wars. Or, as Keen[25] states, "War is continuation of economics by other means".

The armed economic entrepreneurs are not struggling for a stake in the political centre; rather they want to control particular segments of a national territory containing natural resources and other valuables. In opposition to this view, William Reno[26] argues that warlords are often part of

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[23] Collier, Paul, Elliott, V. L., Hegre, Håvard; Hoeffler, Anke, Reynal-Querol, Marta; Sambanis, Nicholas, "Breaking the conflict trap. Civil war and Development policy", *World Bank policy research report*. (Washington D.C:World Bank, 2003).

Collier, Paul and Ankie Hoeffler (2005): "Coup Traps: Why Does Africa have so many coups d'Etat?" *Preliminary draft*, (Oxford: Centre for the Study of African Economies, Dept of Economics, Univ. of Oxford, 2005).

Collier, Paul, Anke Hoeffler and Måns Söderbom "Aid, Policies, and Risk in Post-conflict Societies" *Paper*, June 17th, (Oxford: Centre for the Study of African Economies, Dept of Economics, Univ. of Oxford, 2006).

[24] Berdal, Mats and David M. Malone (eds.), *Greed and grievance. Economic Agendas in Civil wars.*(Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2000)

[25] Keen, " Incentives and Disincentives", p. 27.
[26] Reno, *Warlord Politics.*

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the old political elite that seek to reinforce their power. Antonio Giustozzi[27] takes a similar

position by defining warlords as "legitimate and maybe charismatic military-political leader who

needs to wage periodically successful military campaigns, has full and autonomous control over a

military force, exercises political control over part of the territory of a state". The control these

warlords may be used to build proto-states, small state structures, they may build upon a military

monopoly and are thus much more likely to establish state organisation.

On the other hand, the warlord "uses violence to maintain his power, has little or no political

legitimacy, a neo-patrimonial attitude, is concerned with his own benefit, lacks interest in

changing the nature of the state he is trying to overthrow"[28]. Giustozzi emphasises the territorial

dimension– he argues that warlordism erupts in countries that are "strongly regionalised" due the

"size", "difficult geography" and "complex ethnic/religious make-up" of the country[29].

In a literature review, it is held that David Horowitz[30] has few if any academic followers in

stating that "ethnic conflicts is at the centre of politics" and civil wars in Africa. Instead, the

review concludes that ethnicity is only one among many factors interplaying in recent civil wars

in Africa, and it is a card played by faction leaders mainly when recruiting soldiers[31]. Ethnic

belonging is thus a way of mobilizing and manipulating people, making them opposing parties in

conflict. The "ethnic school" cannot explain why so many ethnic groups live peacefully for

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[27] Giustozzi, Antonio, "The debate on warlordism. The importance of military legitimacy". *Crisis States
    Project Discussion paper*, 13, (London: Crisis States Research Center, 2005) Downloadable from:
    http://www.crisisstates.com/download/dp/dp13.pdf, p. 9.

[28] Giustozzi, "The debate on warlordism", p. 9.
[29] Giustozzi, "The debate on warlordism", p. 15.

[30] Horowitz, Donald, *Ethnic groups in conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p 12.

[31] Braathen, Bøås and Sæther, "Ethnicity kills?", pp. 18-19

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decades[32]. Paul Collier et al[33] argue that societies with many ethnic and religious groups actually

are less likely to have civil war than in countries with one ethnicity and religion. However, if

there are several ethnic groups, but one forms the majority, the risk of civil war increases by

about 50%[34].

4 Peace making

Peace settlements, in contrast to war settlements where a winner takes all, depends on some type

of voluntary and shared commitment of all the main war factions. However, peacemaking in

practice as well as in the literature seems to pay too much attention to multiparty elections and

procedures to re-install a strong and legal government. If the elections are carried out on a

winner-takes-all basis, not much is gained in terms of building peace and legitimate governments.

UN and other international actors have largely seen elections as a peace making mechanism[35].

However, elections have led to mixed results according to Lyons[36]:

- Promoting peace and state reconstruction (El Salvador, Mozambique)

- "serving as a mechanism of war termination, but with only a limited relationship to

   democratization" (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia, Tadjikistan).

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[32] Keen "Incentives and Disincentives", p. 22.

[33] Collier, Paul, Elliott, V. L., Hegre, Håvard; Hoeffler, Anke, Reynal-Querol, Marta; Sambanis, Nicholas, "Breaking the conflict trap", p. 57.

[34] We are fully aware of that Collier's studies have been widely disputed and his view and methodology has changed over the last few years. There is no room for a lengthy discussion on his works in this paper. See also Nathan, Laurie, "The frightful inadequacy of most of the statistics. A critique of Collier and Hoeffler on causes of civil war", *Track Two Volume*, 12, 5. December (2005) and Keen, "Since I am a Dog".

[35] Reilly, Ben, "Democratic validation" chapter 15 in Darby, John and Mac Ginty, Roger (eds.): *Contemporary peace making. Conflict, violence and Peace processes*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p 178.

[36] Lyons, Terrence, "Transforming Institutions of War: Post-conflict Elections and the Reconstruction of Failed States" in Rotberg, Robert I (ed.): *When States Fail. Causes and Consequences.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 272.

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- leading to more conflict (Angola 1992, Rwanda 1993).

Several scholars point to the potential pitfalls of holding elections too soon after making peace. Politics has to be demilitarized before elections; otherwise the war power dynamics are likely to influence elections[37]. UN has withdrawn troops after elections, which has created instability rather than furthering peace. However, this practice is changing: in East Timor and Kosovo the UN has followed another track. Building up local level democratization and allowing time for state structures to be established and work before holding elections[38]. National consultative bodies of local leaders have been introduced without an electoral process[39]. Marina Ottaway[40] believes that elections are not the way to start a democratisation process. Pugh and Cobble[41] share this view, arguing that one should rather focus on "introducing notions of accountability and participation"[42].

Already in the first peacemaking arrangements principles of power sharing, as well as power checks and power balances, are addressed knowingly or unknowingly. In the literature, a particular strand of consociationalism is widely discussed[43].

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[37] Reilly, "Democratic Validation"; Lyons, "Transforming Institutions", p. 274.
[38] Reilly, "Democratic Validation", p 178.
[39] Reilly, "Democratic Validation", p 178.

[40] Ottaway, Marina, "Democratization in Collapsed States," in William Zartman (ed.) *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 242.

[41] Pugh and Cobble (2001): "Non-nationalist voting in Bosnian Municipal Elections: implications for democracy and peace building", *Journal of Peace Research* 38, 1 (2001), pp. 27-47.

[42] Latto, Benedict, "Governance and conflict management: Implications for Donor Intervention" *Working paper* no 9 (London: Crisis States Research Project, LSE, 2002), p. 12.

[43] The debate on consociationalism as a tool of peace making is only discussed briefly in this paper, due to the focus on the territorial dimension.

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One of the main issues in a peace settlement, whether dictated or negotiated, with long term implications for peace building and conflict management, is the post-war reorganisation of the disputed territories. The key issue is: *How much autonomy should be granted to certain territories in particular and to various levels of territorial organisation in general?*

Fernand de Varennes[44] treats *territorial autonomy* as one out of three common subjects in peace agreements after 1945. The two other subjects are human rights guarantees and fair distribution of resources/employment. Territorial autonomy is a key wherever there are claims for autonomy from a minority group involved in a conflict. In most cases, such claims are salient because "the discriminatory distribution of power and resources and other violations of the rights of minorities" are seen as the causes for conflict[45]. According to Varennes[46] it is imperative to change the institutional structure of the state in order to get a successful peace agreement that is agreed upon by minorities (ibid.). Decentralisation of power may represent a valuable and effective concession to minority groups and thus be a strategy for making peace with minority groups.

Thus one can observe four types of solutions:

1. *Full national independence*. In the rare cases of successful 'secessionist' civil wars, the national boundaries are redrawn and new nations/states are recognised (nationalism).

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[44] Varennes, Fernand de, "Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflicts: A comparative Analysis of Content and Approaches", chapter 13 in Darby, John and Mac Ginty, Roger (eds.): *Contemporary peace making. Conflict, violence and Peace processes,(* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[45] Varennes, "Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict", p. 155.
[46] Varennes, "Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict"

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2. *Extensive national autonomy*. Semi-independent entities are established within a federal state (federalism)

3. *Regional self-government*. Regional entities with own administration, elected assemblies and decision-making powers in specified policy areas are established under a unitary state centre (**regionalism**).

4. *Municipal self-government*. District-or city-based entities with own administration, elected assemblies and decision-making in specified areas powers are established (**municipalism**).

The various types, particularly municipalism, appear in different combinations. They vary as to the degree of decision-making powers and autonomy (devolution) attributed to each territorial level of the state.

Regarding the issue of post-conflict territorial reorganisation, bargaining takes place between the advocates of a strong state centre, one the one hand, and of full local autonomy, on the other. The central-local relations of a state are under constant (re-)negotiation. There is a trade off between the concerns for central control and local autonomy, respectively. Reorganisation along federalist or regionalist lines, with specified degrees of regional autonomy built into the reformed state structures (types 2 and 3), is a much applied solution to civil wars with a sharp territorial dimension. However, this is not a domain for technical state craftsmanship. Territorial reorganisation reflects a dynamic combination of the balance of forces, pre-existing institutional set-ups and, preferences of actors in each case. One needs to understand the contextual dynamics.

Just to mention some of the calculations that might take place, one may start to assess the financial-economic strength of the various regions of the country. There are surplus and deficit

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regions. Representatives of surplus ('rich') regions may prefer a weak state centre and as much regional (fiscal!) autonomy as possible. Representatives of deficit ('poor') regions, by contrast, may favour a strong state centre with capacity to redistribute wealth across territories. Inter-regional differences may thus be decreased, thus mitigating the potential conflict between regions and the central state[47].

If the centre is lost, due to collapse of the state, or there is very little to redistribute (all regions are equally poor), even the poor regions might opt for optimal regional autonomy. The old central state elite may opt for a solution that contributes to satisfy their primary clients/supporters and/or pacify their main opponents. Technocrats may argue strongly for arrangements with high allocative efficiency and pro-development impacts. Various coalitions between different regional forces, state elite factions, and external actors (like peace process supporting agents) may emerge.

Moreover, decentralisation may be used as a cooptation strategy by the national government, preserving national unity and peace by integrating opposing parties in the national political system[48]. An example of such a strategy is the case of Mali. The Malian government launched a decentralisation reform in 1992 in order to integrate separatist Tuareg groups in Northern part of

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[47] Mehler, Andreas (2001): "Dezentraliserung und Krisenprävention", in Thomi, Wand Teinich, M. and Polte, W (eds.): *Dezentraliserung in Entwicklungsländern. Jüngere Ursachen, Ergebnise und perspektiven staatlicher reformpolitik.* Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

[48] Hartmann, Christof "Local Government and Conflict Management in Divided Societies". New version of *Paper* presented at the 11th EADI conference (Bonn: 21-24 September2006), *work in progress, draft.*

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the country into a political institutionalized structure at the regional and local levels to contain

further conflict[49].

5 Conflict management

When coming to conflict management, or "the positive and constructive handling of difference

and divergence"[50], a focal point seems to be 'consociationalism'. The advocates of

consociationalism promote systematic power sharing. Timothy Sisk[51] refers to consociationalism

as a system accommodation by ethnic group leaders at the political centre (grand coalition

cabinets), guarantees of group or regional autonomy (federalism and regionalism), guarantees of

minority rights, "constitutionally agreed upon guarantees ensuring minority groups rights, in

which minorities are "protected from the excesses of democracy qua majoritarian rule" [52] and

"proportionality in all spheres of public life"[53].

"Proportional representation systems are praised as the more consensual system, which is better

equipped to suit the exigencies of ethnically fragmented societies"[54]. According to R.T.

Akinyele[55] consociational democracy is the only way one can "guarantee political stability in

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[49] Seely, Jennifer C, "A political analysis of decentralisation: coopting the Tuareg threat in Mali", in
  Journal of Modern African Studies, 39 (3) (2001), p. 499-524.

[50] Harriss and Reilly, *Democracy and Deep-rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators*. An International
IDEA Handbook. (Stockholm: IDEA, 1998), p. 18.
[51] Sisk, Timothy (2003):"Power-sharing after Civil Wars: Matching Problems to Solutions", chapter 12 in
Darby, John and Mac Ginty, Roger (eds.), *Contemporary peace making. Conflict, violence and Peace
processes*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 144.
[52] Varennes, "Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict", p. 158.
[53] Varennes, " Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict", p. 144.
[54] Hartmann, Christof "Local Government and Conflict Management in Divided Societies", p 7.
[55] R.T. Akinyele, "Power-sharing and Conflict Management in Africa: Nigeria, Sudan, and Rwanda",
Africa Development , XXV, 3 &4 (2000), p. 229.

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divided African countries" (referring to Nigeria, Sudan and Rwanda). Wunsch[56] supports this argument, arguing that consociational system of central government, combined with a federal system and following the principle of subsidarity (that the level which is closer to the targeted population should manage it) is the better in managing conflicts in African countries.

Sisk[57] denies this, stating that consociational institutions are only one out of many solutions to managing conflicts by institutional means. Moreover, he claims that "consociational theories tend to assume that motives for conflict reduction already exist among the leaders of the groups. Thus, they assume this problem away, and it is not a trivial problem"[58].

However, in "designing appropriate institutions that structure and guide the existing conflicts in such a way that all conflict parties can be accommodated"[59], what is the role for sub-national institutions based on political representation and with a territorially restricted mandate? To what extent does the restructuring of relationship between these institutions and the central government, in terms of decentralisation, serve conflict management?

Territorial reform plays an ambiguous role in peace making and conflict management. On the one hand, it is a mechanism for peace and conflict management in granting groups which have been neglected an additional political space and resources for taking part in decision-making[60]. On the other hand, decentralisation may increase conflict in many ways:

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[56] Wunsch, James S. , "Refounding the African state and local self-governance: the neglected foundation", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 38, 3 (2000), pp. 487-509.

[57] Sisk, "Power-sharing after Civil Wars", p. 142.
[58] Sisk, "Power-sharing after Civil Wars", p. 142.
[59] Schelnberger, "Decentralisation as a Means of Conflict Management", p. 8

[60] See Haug, Marit and Arild Schou, "Conflict and decentralisation". *NIBR report*, (Oslo: NIBR, 2005).

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First, central government faces usually severe challenges in carrying through a territorial autonomy reform due to majority groups or other segments of the population may oppose such a reform. Peace agreements which involve decentralisation may thus spur more conflict in a country[61].

Second, decentralisation provides yet a political arena for competition over state resources and positions.

Third, in providing an arena of influence for nationally marginalised groups may create new minorities within these groups, spurring more conflict[62]. The Peace Agreement in South Sudan 2005 is a good example. Decentralisation had been launched in South Sudan in 1996. There was devolution of decision-making powers within the Civil Authority. However, the SPLA did this without the consent of the minority ethnic group, the Equatorians. They felt they were left out and that the Civil Authority was dominated by the majority group, the Dinkas linked to SPLM/A[63]

The problem with the Peace Agreement of 2005 was that actors from the eastern part of South Sudan country again felt ignored and that it was an agreement between SPLM/A and the national government. However, opposition leaders in the eastern part acknowledged that the peace

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[61] Varennes, "Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflicts", p. 157.

[62] Ghai, Yash, "Territorial Options", chapter 16 in Darby, John and Mac Ginty, Roger (eds.) *Contemporary peace making. Conflict, violence and Peace processes*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 190.

[63] Branch, Adam and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, "Winning the war, but losing the peace? The dilemma of SPLM/A civil administration and the tasks ahead", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2005), pp. 1-20.

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agreement was a good starting point, since it lists decentralisation as an aim[64]. The two most essential issues for peace and reconciliation will have to be handled at the local government level: 1) "the mass repatriation of Equatorians to Dinka-occupied land" 2) "equal access to foreign-provided development and reconstruction resources"[65].

If failing to distribute land that could result in more violent conflict within South Sudan[66].

Legal guarantees, as advocated by the consociationalists, may not count much in these societies. Thus, decentralisation in this respect may lead to the creation of new sub-local groups which 'de-scales' conflict dynamics from the national to the local level. Given its ambiguous role, decentralisation seems to be an intermediate variable- expected to institutionalise and facilitate conflict management at lower levels of the state.

Fourth, decentralisation may increase inequality between regions, because some regions may be equipped with for instance natural resources that it benefits from, while others have poor income. This inequality may thus spur conflict, either between wealthy and poor regions, or between one of these regions and the central government. One example which is related to this argument is the conflict in the Niger River Delta in Nigeria.

Then, is it possible to further and identify different impacts of different decentralisation strategies?

6 From regionalism to municipalism

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[64] Pantuliano, Sarah, "Comprehensive Peace? Causes and consequences of underdevelopment and instability in Eastern Sudan". *NGO Paper,* September, (Dar-es-Salaam: Institute of Development Studies, 2005), p. 24.

[65] Branch and Mampilly, "Winning the war", p. 10.
[66] Branch and Mampilly, "Winning the war", p. 11.

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Yes, if we distinguish between regionalism and municipalism. Regionalism emphasises institutions at the regional level, sometimes even institutions that are despotic or embedded in the traditional authorities. Municipalism favours democratic institutions at the district or city level. One also needs to differ between the short and the long term, and the different contexts must be taken into account. It seems that that regionalism eases conflict on the short term, but perpetuates and even aggravates conflict over time. At least, that is what central government actors may have experienced. In Uganda, there had been several groups fighting for territorial autonomy within the country, such as the Konko and Amba in 1963-64. This movement was reinvigorated in 1979 and a peace settlement was struck with it in 1982. Museweni restored the kingship system and reinstalled the local chief system in order to "ensure national political stability", in a "loose quasiconsociational system"[67].

The traditional authorities received administrative positions, and economic benefits. This system was to be based on "cultural autonomy", but the distinction between such autonomy and political autonomy remained vague[68]. This strategy of incorporation has however not succeeded in all cases, because some of these authorities have claimed full separation from Uganda. This development in Uganda is similar to the process in Ghana, and demonstrates that traditional authorities in general may be seen as a highly unstable political ally for the central government[69].

Local autonomy may thus spur more conflict and lead to claims for secession. If the government fears uprisings or other minority reactions, "then it will often adopt a decentralisation scheme which deliberately fragments potential local power bases into smaller, weaker, non-politically

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[67] Forrest, "The rise of sub-nationalism in Africa", pp. 122-124.
[68] Forrest, "The rise of sub-nationalism in Africa", pp. 122-124.
[69] Forrest, "The rise of sub-nationalism in Africa", pp. 122-124.

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significant units"[70]. This happened in Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. Only village councils are directly elected. The intention behind this organisation of institutions is, according to Crook "to diffuse and fragment any institutional bases around which ethnic or sub-national political identities could re-form themselves"[71]. Since ethnic groups are geographically concentrated, it would have been wise to devolve powers to them qua regions. Regionalism would probably have paid more off than municipalism, in terms of effectiveness and development.

The national rulers often combine regionalism and municipalism, but with change in emphasis over time. For example, post-apartheid South Africa and post-Mengistu Ethiopia started out with emphasis on confederalism/regionalism, mainly to pacify key players and/or partners. Once the new regime has consolidated itself, and territorial peace has been secured, regional autonomy has been undermined. District and municipal councils are increasingly emphasised in national policy making. The shift towards municipalism has contributed to social development and peace building in South Africa, but less so in Ethiopia, Mali, Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. Why?

The explanation may lie partly in the narrow power interests of the national rulers, not allowing for optimal size of the municipalities. And "weak decentralised units may be ill-equipped to manage conflicts"[72]. The lack of resources, which is a frequent problem in many decentralisation reforms may lead to or increase conflict. Decentralisation must ensure a fairer distribution of resources across the country.

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[70]Crook, Richard, "Strengthening democratic governance in conflict torn societies: civic organisations, democratic effectiveness and political conflict" *IDS working paper* no 129. (Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 2001), p. 10.

[71] Crook, "Strengthening democratic governance", p. 10.

[72] Hartmann, "Local Government and Conflict Management", p. 7.

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Partly the explanation is different capacities and opportunities (such as the extent of mass literacy, public transparency and state financial/human resources of the state). These factors may decide whether decentralisation is linked with a national transformation project that earns wide popular support and emphasises democratisation both at central and local levels. Strategic choices matter, but resources and structural constraints decide?

The most successful, developmental and peace building types of decentralisation seem to prerequisite a strong state centre with powers and political will to (i) redistribute national resources to optimally sized municipalities and (ii) ensure competent local administrations under effective democratic control. In that way, the government is brought closer to the people, it is more capable to include and respond to the people's grievances, and it can pre-empt central-local conflicts. Government becomes a central-local partnership.

Underpinning the local independence (autonomy) strategy, there is an assumption of central-local relations as being ruled by a zero-sum game: either there must be full central state control, or there must be full local autonomy. In contrast, 'plus-sum' thinking seems to underlie the inter-dependence strategy: both central and local levels of a nation can benefit from a shared decentralisation policy. In other words, decentralisation that emphasises the inter-dependence rather than independence of the local tiers in their relationships with the central ones, are important for any post-conflict state building strategy to produce lasting peace dividends.

8. Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that decentralisation as devolution plays an ambiguous role in peacemaking and conflict management processes. Being an instrument of power sharing, decentralisation may lead to peace and conflict management, but such sharing of power may also further conflict. Examples from armed conflicts in African countries demonstrate this ambiguity.

Making the separation between regionalism and municipalism, we have further shown that these examples reveal different impacts of the various decentralisation strategies used to make peace and manage conflicts on the continent. In several of the African cases reviewed, we argue that regionalism and municipalism have been combined in various ways as strategies of decentralisation, with a move from the first to the latter over time. In most of these cases, the strategies have had a poor outcome when it comes to peace building and social development. In order for decentralisation to lead to lasting peace and conflict management, we argue that inter-dependence between local and central levels of the state, as well as fiscal equity and local government accountability is needed.