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NOTE DE RECHERCHE

OWNERSHIP IN STATE BUILDING POLICIES: A NOTION THAT MATTERS?

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ABSTRACT

Since the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, "Ownership" has become the mantra of international development policies, including those related to state-building. Talking about ownership may seem redundant, given the fact that these international actors call for ownership by local actors on matters within their sovereignty. If ownership may be readily used in this kind of discourse on state-building, its current usage should demand its operationalization. This thinking focuses on the essence of the concept and stresses on how it can be operationalized when dealing with public policies in peacebuilding context.

KEY WORDS

- Ownership
- Participation
- Responsibility
- Sovereignty
- Actors
- State building

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Ownership: a meaningful or a meaningless concept?

Etymologically, "*ownership*" comes from the Latin *proprius*, which means both "*who I am*" and "*what is mine*." In the Robert Dictionary, ownership includes two key ideas. First, it is the action of appropriating, of making a proper purpose or of adapting something to a specific destination. Second, ownership is also defined as the unilateral acquisition of property, i. e., an idea, a skill, etc., that is owned privately (Dictionnaire Robert, 2012). This shows as argued Pierre Jacquemot that ownership covers two meanings: "*the right match to the context (suitable) and better control of the beneficiary (suitable for)*"(Jacquemot, P., 2007:180). In these two respects, ownership involves both the adaption to a different or original context and owner control over his universe previously acquired. Marc Raffinot explicitly claims that one can only own what is another's (Raffinot, M., 2009:6).

According to the scholarship on aid and development, ownership is considered to be the "*acceptance of responsibility through the process of stakeholder participation, empowerment and consensus*" (Singh, S., 2002:47) or "*a commitment of the authorities and a majority of national stakeholders for reforms supported by donors*" (Zimmermann, F., McDonnel, I., 2008:27). In sum, the concept of ownership could be understood by employing its common associations, which include: participation, responsibility, and sovereignty.

Ownership as Participation of local actors

The World Bank is the first institution that introduced the concept of local participation. Its definition of local participation cuts across the elements of the notion of ownership. Local participation encourages people to take control of their destiny, to make local governments more accountable for their development, to make the public powers more attentive to the wishes of the population (World Bank, 1989). Local stakeholders influence and share control

over policy formulation, resource allocation, and access to public goods and services (Cling, J.-P. et al., 2002: 32)

Patrick D'Aquino, a scholar interested with participation approach in development studies, critically stressed that local participation as the World Bank has designed it, conceals meanings that make it problematic. D'Aquino has delineated four hidden meanings that can be mobilized by various stakeholders in their mutual interactions. It can create an exchange of views with the backdrop goal of transferring one vision of the facts to targeted actors (sensitizing participation). Participation can also construct a shared vision by the group agreeing to amend its own view of the facts (diagnostic participation). It can also proceed through the division of tasks and responsibilities in the management of a program (collaborative participation). Finally, participation can mean sharing decisions regarding the selection of priority issues to be treated (democratic participation) (D'Aquino, P., 2007:1-3).

In common, these different meanings recognize a significant role for local actors but this recognition is not novel in the developmental discourse. Indeed, conceived as the first doctrine of intervention, which takes into account the population as the basis of development, it has turned the whole colonial indirect rule enterprise, before making the background for the management of international financial institutions approach to development. Finally the idea of local participation also became a justification for the most autocratic regimes in developing countries to reject international policy and development programs (Parpart, J.L., 2000:223)

Then, the question that arises with the participation of local actors is the nature of their previous ability to express their views on political security or development issues raised by experts (international or government). In understanding the involvement of local actors, it is essential to analyze the quality and legitimacy of the actors involved. Ultimately, it is necessary that stakeholders realize a way to explain how their problem is defined because they can only react within their fields of knowledge. Obviously, external actors have or are expected to have knowledge that is "universally" recognized in the state-building field. They assume an authority position on what needs to be done. Finally, local knowledge and local actors remain subject to predefined principles by experts. At this level, the first sense of participation of local actors joins with the idea of ownership in terms of acceptance of what is defined by the external actor.

The second is related to the political culture. In situations in which representation of authority take precedence over free expression, the call to local participation is reduced to a staged session and actually affirms the power to impose political choices (D'Aquino, 2007:3). Joining the participation of local stakeholders with ownership permits the identification of several profiles of locals. If all these actors participate in a program, the question remains to what degree of autonomy do the local players have in decision-making when the objectives and methods are (pre) defined in a very different environment. Given that the objectives are not defined by local participants, they are not able to ensure their effective participation afterwards. Thus, it is appropriate to consider the call for local participation as a way to better control and even coerce them to act. This raises the question of responsibility.

Ownership as Responsibility of local actors

Responsibility is another concept linked to ownership. The concept of responsibility is underpinned by a notion of personal commitment, that is, an ability to make a decision and assume or accept the consequences (La Mura, R.M., 2003:101). Some scholars have identified two forms of responsibility. Max Weber, the renowned sociologist, distinguished the ethics of conviction (relating to morality) and the ethics of responsibility (based on deliberation or rationality before making a decision) (Weber, M., 2001:64) In both cases, the person is trying to achieve what is appropriate to the context, and acts are attributable to him (Ricoeur,1995: 47-70). Within the fields of state-building policies, responsibility refers to the idea of governance in which the actors have not only full responsibility but are also empowered by the fact that they are stakeholders in the decision-making arena. Responsibility can be interpreted in terms of the process of obtaining a capacity to act that may be controlled by a superior who is a legitimate actor. In the case of external organizational funding, donors call for local actors to be responsible for their state-building policies. The external stakeholders desire that local actors play the central role in change, but want the management of change to be defined by themselves. Responsibility is no more a mixture of a call for both autonomy and dependence.

However, speaking of local players as a whole raises the question of whom to empower as responsible and for what responsibility. Indeed, actors possess diverse roles and positions of power for which they must be held responsible. Yet, the relationships are sometimes asymmetrical. In this regard, the authority of the state cannot operate without responsibility for public policies. But in post-conflict countries, the existence of a responsible state apparatus

is problematic in that the intrinsic link that weaves between the conditions of socialization and the emergence of responsibility has led to the irresponsibility of those who have the power and responsibility has devolved to those who do not(Smilie, I, Soilignac-Lecomte, 2003) The call and the involvement of several actors (the government, local communities, grassroots communities, NGOs) in state-building issues has led Governments 'states to share responsibility with these actors who do not have the legitimacy to decide. All these actors even if they act and interact with the government actor, still are, without any responsibility. This means that in case of dissatisfaction of the population with a policy introduced as state-building one, the claims are made in destination to the state, not to civil society or any other organization.

Ultimately, the notion of responsibility is quite important if compared to the participation. Even with multiple actors acting at multiple levels, the role of the state is still important and crosscuts the notion of ownership as sovereignty.

Ownership as Sovereignty of local actors

The principle of sovereignty is undoubtedly one that actually expresses the foundation of modern states' power. Although the contemporary transformations have contested its essence or at least called for it to be revisited (Cohen, J.-L., 2006), state sovereignty implies more responsibility and stresses on the notion of ownership (Whitfield, L., 2009: 14).

Specifically, the state's sovereignty within a state-building dynamic is a call to formulate and implement policies without external interference. The question that then is if a state is sovereign, does it need to own its policies?
If the concept of ownership were subsumed within the meaning of sovereignty, the degree of legitimacy of the actions taken by the state would be stressed and become, in the end, an indicator of how sovereignty is interpreted. And in this case, international actors would hold sovereign states in post-conflict countries to more ownership.

Nevertheless, this demand of ownership can be interpreted by the internal and external stakeholders in two different ways. Internal or local actors in these states may consider ownership as the exercise of legitimate authority even for actions that do not really have added value for the state or its population. This demand for ownership of its actions may be considered by the regime as the ability to reject the proposals of external actors

when consensus is not clear from the start. In addition, ownership may require wielding sovereignty and bypassing the standards that are conveyed on state building mechanisms if they constitute a barrier to material and symbolic interests of local leaders.

On the other hand, relying on local ownership as an act of state's sovereignty, external actors want to question the state's responsibilities, but it is implicitly a form of escape from responsibilities that donors should bear in this partnership. By requiring compliance with standards developed in the West, external stakeholders want to ensure their own goals in the vision of local actors without assuming responsibility (Pender, J., 2007:113-130)

In this context, the failure of external policies to produce state building is considered to be the result of weak governance or lack of ownership of local actors. In conclusion, the concept of ownership is an inherently complex concept and induces multiple interpretations. It then returns us to the question of political interpretation of this concept. Should it be a new formulation of relations between North and South? Is Ownership an instrument of domination in aid relationships? How would beneficiaries fit in this new dynamic? All these questions defy operationalizing a concept that both praises and challenges.

Operationalizing the ownership?

Operationalizing a concept is somewhat not always easy. In this policy brief, my aim is to present three ways that this notion can be operationalized by decision makers while dealing with state building policies that involves both local and international actors with asymmetric power. These three suggestions include conviction of local decision makers, formulation and implementation of different programs, and finally coordination of actions and actors.

Conviction of local decision makers

Conviction raised the question of belief as a driver of change. Studies on the transfer of public policies insist on the conviction of local actors. For these studies, the actors are in search of a model because they are convinced of the need to find an effective response to their problems (De Maillard, J., Le Goff, T., 2009:655-679). For local actors to be convinced of the need to own state building policies depends on the circumstances that have brought about the need for these policies. For some countries it may be the attractiveness of a model as we have seen with community policing in the United States and Europe, or the transition

policies from war or dictatorship to peace and democratization. In both cases, local or national actors lead the external contribution by means of expertise and financial support.

The conviction induces a dual dynamic between local and international actors to join efforts for a specific purpose. Hence, taking the conviction as ownership operationalization way, is in fact establishing a link between state building policy model as formulated in international arenas and the degree of assimilation of content of this model to the needs of local stakeholders expressed through the need for state transformation.

Local formulation and implementation of policies

Formulation and implementation of state-building policies are the essential steps of ownership as defined by the Paris Declaration, which consider them to be the key to successful policies (OCDE, 2005). This normative document suggests that it is more important to focus on ensuring that local actors take in hand the policies, including through their formulation and implementation. In this respect, two scenarios can be scaled based on the role of different actors in the formulation and implementation of state building policies. Primarily, local decision makers may engage in setting policies and making programs on which partner would align their support. Second, local actors can accept the risk of a transferred model that takes little or no account of local realities. In this second context, state shoulders are to develop capacities to coordinate actions and actors invested in the implementation of its policies.

Local coordination of actors and activities

Coordination is tightly linked to the concept of sovereignty that assimilates ownership. In this area of state-building policies that implies partnership between internal and external stakeholders, who possess very different statutes, unequal resources, and different actions at different time scales, coordination can be seen as a solution. It allows local decision makers to pull together and control these various actors (internal or external) dispersed in several activities related to the implementation of the chosen policy. The goal is to make their activities compatible with the objectives of the chosen policy. The idea highlighted here with coordination is actually that of employing authority and having control policies in place. Finally, coordination means imposing guidelines, then monitoring the actions of the different actors involved.

Ownership: a notion that matters?

The purpose of this Policy brief that explores the notion of ownership was to inform the public on a concept that has become the mantra of state-building policies, both at local and international level. This concept remains poorly understood but holds deeper meaning in terms of relations between state-building actors. In reviewing the concepts that are implicit in the concept of ownership, the paper emphasizes those aspects that also feed the current debate on domestic policy, especially in countries undergoing reconstruction. However, it is the operationalization that still problematic. These three ways of operationalizing ownership explored and the questions that are relying on each one underline the importance of this notion while dealing with state-building policies. They highlight the way to bridge gaps from theory to practice.

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