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Literature on post conflict stability and security has increasingly focussed on the role of ‘strong enough’ or ‘inclusive enough’ ‘political settlements’ or ‘coalitions’ (Hickey 2013, World Bank 2011) in transitions from conflict and institutional fragility. The multiple terms being used reflect both fluidity and a level of confusion. Post – conflict political settlements, as we define them, develop out of ‘pacts’ or agreements between groups (and especially political and economic elites) that, as they become institutionalised, provide a durable kind of stability and underlying social order involving state and society (Khan 2010, Craig and Porter forthcoming). The *pacts*, then, are crucial and formative: as Kahn (2010:1) notes, they are both ‘compromises’ and ‘combinations’ of “power and institutions that [are] mutually compatible and also sustainable in terms of economic and political viability”, and that set the context for further institutional and policy development. Precisely what sorts of *settlements* emerge from them depend on core elements and historical progress of the institutionalisation process: the modalities, the rents and resources available, and the ongoing, developing relationships between elites and with wider social actors, including voters.

As emerging compromises and combinations developing via complex processes of institutionalisation, these ‘settlements’ are, we think not always particularly settled. Their scope, depth and durability typically shift as a result of on-going bargaining amongst elites, including powerful international ones, like RAMSI, and as a consequence of the different modalities via which they are institutionalised. Institutionalisation processes produce unintended political outcomes, which may or may not support stability. Two factors that combine to determine the scope and depth of the settlement are institutionalised ‘grasp’ and ‘reach’ (Mann 1988). By ‘grasp’, we mean the ability of the settlement to pull together powerful interests, often centrally, and then to clasp together the resources needed to govern with: political power, and economic rents. By ‘reach’, we mean the ability of central actors and the modalities they use to govern and to project power and resources out to places where people live, including those in the settlements, by delivering services, livelihoods and other opportunities.

Dan Slater (2010), considering long term political stability and settlement in South East Asian countries, describes two forms of pacts: 'protection' and 'provisioning' pacts. Each involves different forms of clasping and reaching, and each prompts a different process of institutionalisation. 'Protection pacts' (to simplify) are comparatively rare and stable: they have involved political and economic elites who, concerned that communal, urban, class-based violence will threaten their interests, pact together and contribute economic rents to formal state and political structures (including political parties). Solomon Islands' pact (and the settlement emerging from it) has some aspects of protection, as we will describe: the RAMSI security intervention did suppress urban communal violence and led to a consolidation of central powers and rents, albeit one driven by external actors, more than local ones. But it has not produced a stable protection pact between important political and economic actors.

By contrast, 'provisioning pacts' are made when political elites are beholden to other interests, and need to secure their support by providing them with a share of rents and resources. These can be concessions to commercial actors on tax or resource rents, or political concessions, which put the central state's resources directly into the hands of particular political actors. This kind of provisioning then, is not primarily provisioning of the people, where the state's reach is extended through effective, well-funded state machineries delivering services. Rather, its institutionalisation involves a transfer of revenues and rents out of the state and into private hands or patronage. These pacts result in unsustainable spending, and can ultimately corrode and exhaust state resources and systems. Thus the capabilities needed to make settlements durable are not realised within core political or state functions. Rather, according to Slater, they lead to either fragmentation or militarisation (armed groups in control).

Provisioning is clearly to the fore in shaping elite pacts, institutional capabilities and political settlements in Solomon Islands. Solomon islands seems to face extreme demands for provisioning that result in central rents being both conceded to private concessions (e.g. tax breaks) and allocated to individual political actors to personally distribute to local supporters and projects. Providing services to geographically dispersed communities is difficult and expensive; local demand for services from the state is rarely met, and there is high dissatisfaction with provincial government provisioning. The nature of archipelago politics and the rural gerrymander means that national politicians become preoccupied with getting a share of the rents concentrated in Honiara to take home. Formation of stable political parties to contest elections and distribute rents according to national policy priorities is undermined as MPs are voted for because they respond to local concerns (Corbett and Wood 2013). Any pact among MPs is dominated by short term provisioning, much more than national policy.

A second important dimension of settlement formation in Solomon Islands relates to structural difficulties in achieving durable compromises and combinations between political and economic elites, and the role of money in forging (and destabilising) temporary elite alliances around provisioning. Internationally, the experience is that economic actors make what Charles Tilly (2005) calls 'clientage payments' to political actors in exchange for personalised protection and provision – including concessions. In Solomon Islands, resource (especially timber) rents and concessions, but also import and other tax concessions have been crucial sources of clientage money, received by individual actors at the expense of national revenues.

It is perhaps significant that Solomon Islands economic elites face the challenge of institutionalising their influence across an ethnic cleavage. In other nation settings, pacts between elite political and business groups are consolidated in many ways: business families entering politics, inter-marriage, routine contributions by business to stable political parties. But in Solomon Islands, ethnic elites do not as a rule enter national politics. Arrangements for forging pacts seem especially one dimensional, transactional and fluid: involving money, channelled into direct personal allegiance. The economic-political elite provisioning pact has institutionalised itself as a money-go-round, especially after elections and before confidence votes, when clientage payments enable a whole informal institutional machinery of short term pacting between individual political actors. This does add a little to (central) rents available for (local) provisioning to politicians' supporters. But this form of 'grasping' and 'reaching' takes money out of the formal provisioning and policy based electoral claimsmaking. It makes pacting a matter of immediate elite bargaining rather than electoral statesmanship and programmatic policy for development. The political pacts it enables are corrosive in their policy influence and inherently unstable, even though familiar faces reappear over time to forge them.

Recently, political actors have moved to further enable personalised provisioning by rapidly expanding the system of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), now amounting to around 15% of total budget outlays, and Tertiary Scholarships. These funds 'grasp' resources out of mainstream line ministry budgets and into provisioning arrangements with national MPs who insist they are better placed to 'reach' down into and provision local communities. The expansion in CDFs and Scholarship spending, the IMF reports, have put significant pressure on the budget, and is likely to undermine fiscal discipline and crowd-out other priority programs (IMF 2013). They have created a layer of provisioning within government wherein, critics note, patronage arrangements are developing, and reach is highly uneven. At the same time, extensive donor contributions have formed their own provisioning 'layers' (Thelen 2004) within and alongside Solomon Islands government

systems. The functions of security, justice, central finances, education and health are now all effectively co-produced by government and international donors, in ways that it is difficult to see changing, regardless of how the so-called RAMSI 'transition' plays out. The extent to which this form of co-produced provisioning by donors has created incentives for politicians to build their own, separate layer of discretion (the CDFs) at the expense (corrosion) of state needs further consideration.

Clearly, the shape of any deep and enduring political settlement in Solomon Islands is not yet clear. Both the formal system and the informal clientage arrangements are currently subject to significant fluidity and change, albeit around familiar modalities, commitments and actors. There is little evidence this change is, so far, enabling the good kinds of 'clasp' and 'reach' Solomon Islands needs for long term political stability and social provisioning. But do the complexities around pact formation and institutionalisation mean Solomon Islands has institutionalised a fundamentally unstable, unsustainable political settlement (or 'unsettlement')? Could the institutionalisation of the CDF grasp and reach arrangements in time provide a stable, effective provisioning system that is gradually folded into mainstream state mechanisms?

Politically, there is a widespread desire for peace and improved governance. Institutionally, while there are profound tendencies towards provisioning-driven fragmentation, it is possible that together, the various 'layers' of provisioning arrangements may together be enough to avoid a relapse into violent conflict. Much will depend on how a shift from timber to mining resources plays out (Allen 2011), on the ability of the government to bring informal and clientage rents on budget, and on stable, ongoing external commitments. If provisioning can extend to providing for urban development, and access to international labour markets, the ways in which power is multiply layered in Solomon Islands could be durable. But a more stable settlement that contributes to core state capabilities to grasp and reach will also require donors to be more alert to how their contributions and the modalities through which they engage create incentives for politicians to invest in effective central claspings (via fewer concessions) and local provisioning reach, rather than leaving this to co-production in central ministries, donor programs and unreliable CDFs.

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