

The background of the slide is a close-up photograph of yellow and red felt fabric. The yellow felt is at the top, and the red felt is at the bottom. Several black threads are visible, stitching the two pieces of felt together. The threads are vertical and slightly curved, creating a textured, layered appearance.

# Relief Governance in Fragile Contexts: Applying a 'Political Settlements' Lens

Jan Pospisil, PSRP, Edinburgh Law School  
*World Conference on Humanitarian Studies, Addis Ababa*

# Humanitarian aid in fragile contexts



- Disputed concepts in humanitarian aid: neutrality, humanitarian space
- Both concepts difficult, as humanitarian aid always has political implications
- currently change of political conditions for relief aid in 'recipient' countries: neo-sovereignty
- Heavy implications on humanitarian aid
- 'Political settlements' approach: does this make sense, and how could it assist?



# Becoming more political - the donor side



- ‘resilience’ concept has changed face of humanitarian aid in two ways:
  - new focus on people, societies, markets – focus on local structures, circumventing state level
  - Blurring boundaries of relief and development
- Despite other claims, changes political implications of relief/aid



# Becoming more political - the recipient side



- reaction to ‘resilience’, but also broader political movement
- g7+, developmental regimes offer strong visions (‘resilient nations’)
- ‘neo-sovereignty’ – national ownership (controlled by governments), but responsibility with ‘outsourced’ accountability
- No acceptance of ‘just’ assisting people, communities, societies; national level wants control



# The South Sudan case



- December 2013: begin of civil war after collapse of fragile South Sudanese political settlement
- Relief aid became tool of warfare – enabling of government to completely neglect humanitarian situation
- Long-term structural consequences
- ‘captured’ situation (Barnett/Zuercher 2009) developed, relief agencies blackmailed



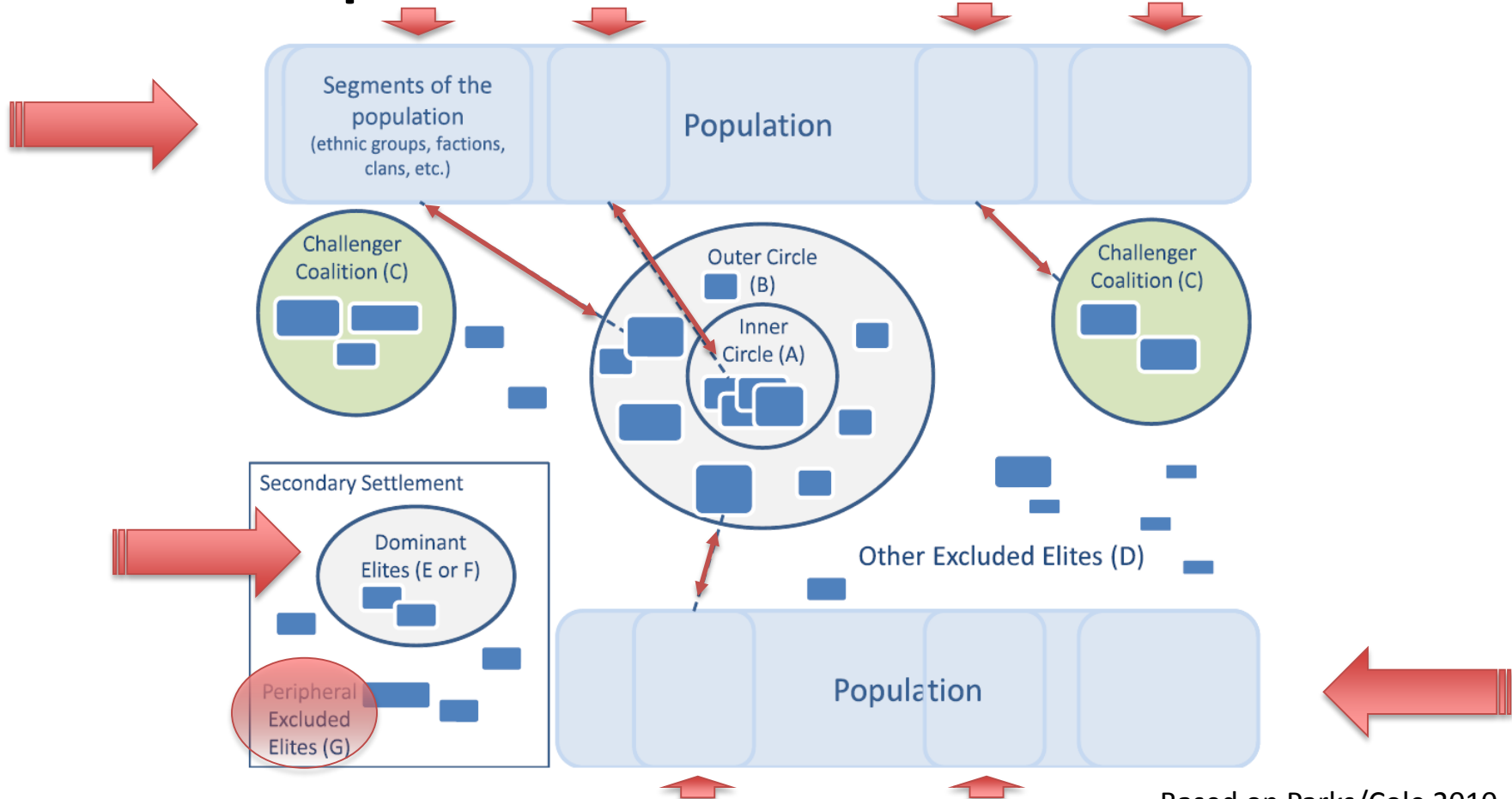
# 'Political settlements'



- 'bargaining outcomes among contending elites' (Di John/Putzel)
- Actors, their interests, formal and informal institutions – government just one of those
- Complex, multi-layered systems
- Permanent informal process of elite bargaining, international actors become part



# Relief impact on political settlements



Based on Parks/Cole 2010



# Relief governance and 'political settlements'



- Impact of relief/aid:
  - Shifting power-relations within elite settlement
  - Strengthening elite settlement against competitors
- No point in trying to deliberately alter political settlements by using aid (e.g. Khan 2013, 'results too uncertain')
- 'political settlements' analysis supports conceptualization of political effects of humanitarian relief





# Relief under neo-sovereign conditions



- Neo-sovereign condition could develop into a game changer for humanitarian aid
- No easy way out – no neutral space anymore, under conditions of neo-sovereignty, humanitarian aid becomes strategic resource in for political settlement stabilisation or in elite bargaining
- Humanitarian relief is structurally beyond ‘do no harm’ in fragile contexts, as there is no neutral space
- Political assessments – political decisions





# Open questions

- How to deal with political settlements – and governments as their formal institutional element?
- Is there a point of disengagement (as conditionality won't work)?
- Merge aid and development under an explicit political mandate?

