

A Constitutional Pied Piper: The Northern Irish Good Friday Agreement

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As in other recent cases of momentous political change after long years of stalemate and stagnation, the pace of reform in the six counties of the north of Ireland has quickened since the mid 1990s. The current peace process has its roots in the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985, which established an Inter-governmental Conference of Irish and British ministers to discuss political and legal matters relevant to Northern Ireland. Despite considerable Protestant Unionist opposition to the agreement, five years later the British government launched an initiative to convene discussions between the parties of the north and south and themselves about a possible future settlement framework. However, the late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by burgeoning paramilitary atrocities and political intransigence. It was not until the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 that the horizon brightened and negotiations between all significant actors began to be a real possibility.

The Declaration outlined structures for peace negotiations, allowed for the possibility of a united Ireland, and unequivocally accepted the legitimacy of self-determination within the province. After nine months of wrangling, the initiative of British Prime Minister John Major and the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds intrigued the Irish Republican Army (IRA) sufficiently for it to announce a cessation of violence, which was accompanied by loyalist paramilitary cease-fires.¹ In December 1995, the framework was given teeth in discus-

¹ I use the terms Unionist and Loyalist interchangeably to identify that part of the Northern Irish community, predominantly Protestant, that supports the retention of the six counties of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Similarly, I use interchangeably the terms Nationalist and Republican to identify that community, predominantly Catholic, that seeks increased Irish government engagement in the administration of the six counties.

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sions with all significant parties under the chairship of former U.S. Senator George Mitchell. However, an increasingly insecure Conservative government in Westminster stalled on implementing the Mitchell Commission recommendations, and the IRA ended their cease-fire with the explosion of a huge bomb in London's Docklands. Nevertheless, the peace process stumbled on and in May 1996, elections for the Northern Ireland Forum brought the widest array of political viewpoints ever marshalled together in the six counties. The Good Friday Agreement was finally signed in April 1998 and ratified by large majorities on both sides of the border—71 percent in the north and 94 percent in the south. It led to a general election for a new Northern Irish power-sharing Assembly in July 1998. After months of painfully slow negotiations over the thorny issues of arms decommissioning and constituting a multiparty executive, in fall 1999, the parties have reached an impasse and the peace process has stalled. The potential for the polity to slip back into violence remains high. But there is little doubt that the north is closer to a peaceful settlement than it has been in the previous seventy-seven years of its existence and that a major shift in thinking and perception has facilitated the new dawn.

But Northern Ireland has seen many false dawns before. The first attempt at introducing power-sharing arrangements collapsed in 1974, and successive attempts at crafting a political settlement—1980 (Anglo-Irish summit in Dublin), 1983 (New Ireland Forum), 1985 (Anglo-Irish Agreement), and 1993 (the Downing Street Declaration)—all failed to end the spiral of political violence. What makes this latest peace process and the institutions it entrenches more likely to succeed? What are the longer-term political implications of the successful implementation of the Good Friday agreement?

The arguments made in this article follow the progression of four key points. First, the Good Friday agreement is the clearest example of fully blown consociationalism that exists today. For that reason alone, it is a crucial case study for the emerging discipline of constitutional design and conflict management.²

Second, the prospects for the successful implementation of power-sharing are more favorable now than they have ever been before. The agreement offers the best hope for substantive curtailment of the spiral of violent sectarianism that has poisoned the daily life of the six counties since 1966.

Third, the envisioned consociational institutional arrangements are heavily accented by their inherent transitional nature. Northern Ireland today has parallels with states that made the journey from unstable minority rule to majority reincorporation—South Africa and Zimbabwe. All three processes were trans-

² For representative works, see Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996); Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry Into Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Donald Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

placements, and all three resulted in the adoption of some form of power-sharing within government.

Finally, if the Good Friday arrangements are transitional, one logical ultimate destination is the reunification of Ireland, most likely as an asymmetrical federal state with provincial government and group rights crafted to assuage minority (Protestant) fears in the north.

The core of this article outlines the nature of the peace process in the north of Ireland and the resulting political institutions being implemented as levers of conflict management in the bipolar society. The later section draws upon the comparative evidence from two earlier transitions within communally divided societies—South Africa and Zimbabwe.

NORTHERN IRELAND AND ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

Conflict in Northern Ireland has historically been defined by disputes over political institutions and the power to rule—who is represented and who governs. The Good Friday agreement is a watershed, because it fundamentally shakes up modes of political administration which over the last three-quarters of a century were used and misused to ensure the dominance of one community over the aspirations of another. Ever since the creation of that part of the United Kingdom called Northern Ireland, electoral institutions have been the intellectual battleground that formed the backdrop to the battleground on the streets. Michael Collins was the much romanticized military commander of the 1916–1922 rebellion against British rule. At his last meeting with Winston Churchill (at the time the minister responsible for Irish Affairs in Downing Street) to negotiate the treaty that established the Irish Free State, he pressed for proportional representation (PR) to be used in the north to protect the voice of the nationalist minority. Collins had helped introduce PR for parliamentary elections in the south as a protective mechanism for Protestants and other minorities. PR was retained for general elections in the six counties in 1921 and 1925; but after a scare in the second election, Unionists abolished PR and instituted first-past-the-post elections, which would entrench their political superiority for the next fifty years. This curtailment of electoral competition was illustrated by the fact that between 1929 and 1969 nearly 40 percent of all members of the Northern Irish parliament were returned unopposed, and Prime Minister Terence O’Neill was not opposed at all in his constituency between 1946 and 1969.³

In conjunction with their opposition to PR, the Unionists vetoed the creation of any second chamber of an Ulster parliament that might overrepresent Catholics. Tim Pat Coogan argues that the Unionist insistence on overtly majoritarian and exclusionary institutions laid the ground for a pseudostate, which could never fully evolve or integrate its communities. “Perhaps, peaceful assim-

³ Paul Arthur, “Political Parties: Elections and Strategies” in Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow, eds., *Northern Ireland Politics* (London: Longman, 1996), 68.

ilation could have taken place. In the event, however, what was created was a fundamentally undemocratic state specifically designed to prevent power changing hands, or to allow reform to take place from within by the normal democratic processes of education, organization, and the ballot box.⁴

The modern troubles, which wrought so much havoc and pain on Northern Ireland, were sparked by the civil rights marches of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But those marches were precipitated by half a century of overt electoral gerrymandering, undemocratic voting practices, and the subsequent housing and employment discrimination prosecuted by Unionist-controlled councils in Nationalist areas. The northwest Irish city of Derry was (and remains today) over two-thirds Catholic and one-third Protestant, but sophisticated gerrymandering of district boundaries enabled the Unionist third to win a comfortable majority on the city council. In 1961, 9,235 Protestants were able to elect twelve Unionist representatives, while 14,325 Catholics could only return eight Nationalists.⁵ Furthermore, voting at the local government level was restricted to property owners and council-house dwellers and their spouses, and because Unionist councils would only assign public housing to Unionist voters, Nationalist interests were doubly discriminated against, removing nearly half the Catholic electorate from the local government voters rolls.

When some degree of Catholic inclusion in government was introduced by the Sunningdale agreements of 1973—a power-sharing executive based on an Assembly elected by proportional representation and a cross-border Council of Ireland—intransigent Unionist politicians brought the peace plan down with a massive and ugly general strike within a matter of months. Allowing the minority a legislative and executive foothold was an anathema to most Loyalists who (probably correctly) saw the tinkering with political institutions as the precursor to more lasting structural change.

CONSTITUTIONAL ENGINEERING AND CONFLICT IN THE NORTH

There have been three critical turning points in the north of Ireland in the twentieth century. First, the hiving off of six of the nine counties of Ulster away from the remaining twenty-six counties of Ireland in 1920. These were subsequently retained within the United Kingdom in 1922. Second, the ill-fated Sunningdale agreement of 1973 sought to include Nationalist voices in the governance of the province. Finally came the Good Friday agreement of April 1998, after thirty years of violent stalemate between pro- and anti-partition forces. That two of these three turning points revolved around the introduction of power-sharing provisions is unsurprising; but history both inside and outside of Ireland demonstrates that for constitutional engineering to work, one needs appro-

⁴ Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace* (London: Arrow, 1996), 29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

priate institutions, favorable conditions, and the will of those whose will matters.

One of the most influential prescriptions for communally divided societies is that of consociationalism, a term brought back into the lexicon by Arend Lijphart in the late 1960s. Consociationalism entails an institutionally based power-sharing agreement within government, brokered between clearly defined segments of society that may be joined by citizenship but divided by ethnicity, religion, and/or language. Examples of consociational societies have included Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland. Cyprus and Lebanon are cited as countries that had, but no longer have, a consociational ethos, although Lebanon appears to be rebuilding such constructs since the Taif accords of 1993. The mechanics of consociationalism can be distilled into four basic elements that must be present to make a constitution worthy of the consociational name. First is executive power sharing among the representatives of all significant groups (grand coalition); second, a high degree of internal autonomy for groups that wish to have it (segmental autonomy); third, proportional representation and proportional allocation of civil service positions and public funds (proportionality); and fourth, a minority veto on the most vital issues (mutual veto).⁶ These elements ensure that government becomes an inclusive multiethnic coalition, unlike the adversarial nature of a Westminster winner-take-all democracy. The consociational philosophy rests on the argument that in bitterly divided societies the stakes are too high for politics to be conducted as a zero-sum game. The risks of governmental collapse and civil instability are too great for parties to view the executive branch of government as a prize to be won or lost. Majoritarianism in plural societies can lead to the dangerous permanent exclusion of one or a number of minority groups. Northern Ireland is the classic example.

However, the institutions of consociationalism are not a stand-alone panacea. They are highly contextually specific, and their success and endurance requires a number of favorable conditions. Lijphart lists nine areas that can usefully be applied to the Northern Irish case.⁷ First, the most important factor is that there should be no one majority segment. If there is a dominant community with over 50 percent of the population, it is much more likely that majoritarianism will take hold. Second, negotiations among leaders will be facilitated if segments are of equal size. Third, too many segments will require complicated and bilateral bargaining between elites, which will engender gridlock within legislation. Therefore, there should be a small number of segments with the optimum number being between three and five. Fourth, the decision-making process is also simplified if the state has a small population size, because foreign affairs usually takes on less importance, and the distribution of resources is easier to

⁶ Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 25.

⁷ Arend Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley: Institute for International Studies, University of California, 1985), 119–126.

manage. Fifth, the existence of external threats may help to unify a society around a common nationalism and thus increase the potential for cooperation among its component segments. This may precede or follow from, sixth, an overarching sense of national loyalty, which transcends societal divisions and provides the basis for successful consociationalism. Seventh, a further important factor is that there should be some degree of socioeconomic equality. While economic inequality is not an insuperable barrier to consociationalism, it is clear that the larger the economic differentiation between segments, the more difficult political power sharing will be. Eighth, a geographical concentration of segments will aid the development of federalism and decentralization—both important mechanisms of power sharing in a plural society. Finally, long-standing traditions of accommodation, which settle conflict by consensus and compromise and are rooted in the culture, will increase the likelihood of a successful consociational democracy.

At first glance, the six counties seem to have always been particularly unripe for consociational democracy. In the late 1970s and again in 1996, Lijphart argued that the conditions for consociational democracy in Northern Ireland were “overwhelmingly unfavorable.”⁸ The only thing going for power-sharing arrangements was that short of another partition it was the only logical, democratic solution to the problem.⁹ To this day, Northern Ireland contains a dominant majority group, segments are of unequal size, and there is little sense of shared national loyalty. Socioeconomic inequality dovetails with the communal divide, although this is slowly changing. Protestants and Catholics are highly intermixed geographically, and there has been little in the way of a historical tradition of accommodation.

Previous Institutional Attempts

In the 1920s, the new Stormont government did not even attempt to apply the smallest power-sharing fig leaf to its majoritarian institutions. First-past-the-post elections, gerrymandering, and plural voting were all utilized to ensure absolute Protestant dominance over all areas of the quasi-state. The forty-plus years of fragile stability that endured in Northern Ireland until the outbreak of the troubles in the 1960s can be put down to almost total Unionist control of the province’s political institutions, which starved the opposition of the oxygen needed to organize and challenge the hegemony of the majority. There were IRA campaigns in the 1940s and late 1950s, but neither impacted Unionist hegemony to the same degree.

By 1973, the control model¹⁰ was no longer able to keep a lid on Catholic anger; and alienation and a spiral of protests, lawlessness, and sectarian killings

⁸ Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 137.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 137–141; and Arend Lijphart, “The Framework Document on Northern Ireland and the Theory of Power-Sharing,” *Government and Politics* 31 (Summer 1996): 268.

¹⁰ See Ian Lustick, “Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control,” *World Politics* 31 (1979): 325–344.

led to a British government plan that sought to introduce some degree of power sharing to the province for the first time. While the Sunningdale arrangements can be seen as the forerunner of the current peace agreement, the institutional structures envisioned by that document were more tentative and vague than the 1998 Good Friday agreement. The white paper published by the British government in March 1973 foresaw a Northern Irish Assembly effectively sitting underneath the existing British secretary of state for Northern Ireland. The seventy-eight-member Assembly was to be elected under a more inclusive proportional electoral system—the single transferable vote (STV) was proposed in the hope that such a system would give a fillip to moderate parties and the middle ground of political opinion. While the system remained parliamentary, the cabinet was not to be based on any single party if it represented only one of the two communities. Thus there was no mandated power sharing between all significant parties, nor were there provisions for a minority veto or cultural autonomy. In effect, the British government was saying that the Unionists could win a majority in the legislature, but they could not govern without some Catholic representatives. Alongside this was the highly controversial Council of Ireland provision, which sketched the outline of a Dublin-Belfast forum but did not spell out what the Council’s powers might be.

In the Assembly elections of June 1973, seven parties won representation: four Unionist, one Nationalist, and two unaffiliated with sectarian politics. After much internal wrangling on the Unionist side, a ten-member cabinet was eventually put together in January 1974. This was led by Brian Faulkner, the Unionist Leader, with Gerry Fitt, the leader of the Nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) as his deputy. Unionist received four other portfolios, constitutional Nationalists three others, and Oliver Napier, the leader of the Alliance party became minister for law reform. This first attempt at power-sharing was fated to be short-lived.

When measured against the criteria outlined earlier, the 1998 Good Friday accord lays the ground for fully blown consociationalism. Indeed, Lijphart argued that the British government’s 1995 Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland, upon which the Good Friday agreement is heavily based, was “thoroughly consociational in its orientation.”¹¹ The only departure from the model is the nuance of using STV instead of List PR, which Lijphart argues is not as suitable as List PR, because it “maximises the voter’s choice and consequently diminishes the power and flexibility of segmental leaders.”¹² The Assembly elected in July 1998 consisted of 108 parliamentarians elected by preferential voting in seventeen multimember districts. The size of the constituencies, already small in population, meant that a candidate could be elected with only a few thousand votes. Eight parties won seats in the new Assembly: four Unionist parties (along with three independent Unionists) took

¹¹ Arend Lijphart, “The Framework Document on Northern Ireland,” 267.

¹² Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 137.

fifty-eight of the seats; the SDLP and Sinn Féin had forty-two seats combined; while the Alliance Party and Women's Coalition gained six and two seats respectively. Other consociational planks included obligatory power sharing in the executive, which played out in an almost identical way to the ill-fated power-sharing cabinet of 1974. The first prime minister came from the largest community—David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party; while his deputy came from the minority community—Seamus Mallon, deputy leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party. If the current decommissioning impasse is overcome, then the ten executive positions will be shared between the four largest parties, and two Sinn Féin leaders will take office for the first time in a northern government.

Special commissions are being set up to deal with particularly contentious issues: policing, the fate of prisoners, disarmament, and economic discrimination. These commissions will include the representatives of all significant parties. Furthermore, the Good Friday agreement entrenches a powerful minority veto clause over legislation deemed to be relevant to communal interests by requiring cross-community support. Relevant legislation, designated by the executive or 28 percent of the Assembly members, will require parallel consent—that is, a majority of both the Unionist and Nationalist delegations voting, or a weighted majority, 60 percent of all members voting including at least 40 percent of each of the Unionist and Nationalist delegations. Last, a degree of cultural autonomy already exists in the province, as Catholic schools have been subsidized by the British government to the same level as Protestant schools since 1992.

Along with these internal bodies, two cross-national councils are to be set up. A Council of the British Isles is to be attended by delegates from the parliaments of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Westminster, and the Dail; and a North-South Ministerial Council (the much vilified Council of Ireland masquerading under a new name) would promote cooperation between the six counties and the Republic. These institutional mechanisms owe much to the theory of consociationalism and the designation of ethnic groups. Parties self-identified themselves as Catholic/Nationalist or Protestant/Unionist or nonaffiliated, and executive offices were shared upon that basis rather than simple party strength. To show good faith, both Britain and Ireland made legislative/constitutional concessions over their claims to the province. Dublin dropped its long held constitutional claim to Northern Ireland, and Westminster legislated to acknowledge the possibility of a united Ireland if the majority in the north supported reunification.

If it is clear that the current peace plan revolves around the implementation of classically consociational institutions, it is less clear whether such mechanisms have any chance of bringing to an end the cycle of extra-parliamentary violence that has plagued the territory. The precedence is not good. All previous institutions failed with dire consequences because of either their political or temporal inappropriateness. The type of democracy set up in 1922 in the

north was little more than a voting façade painted over a one-party state. Subsequent fissures in Unionist politics meant that there was some degree of intra-Unionist competition for power, but this does not alter the fact that a substantial minority in the province have never had the opportunity to shape the big political decisions made by their executive government. The Sunningdale constructs of 1973–1974 were perhaps more politically conducive to a democratic settlement, but the timing was all wrong. Unionist opinion was a very long way from accepting any deal that smacked of accommodation to the Nationalist minority and extended a hand of friendship to the government of the Republic. A massive general strike organized by the Unionist Ulster Workers' Council brought the life of the province to a halt in 1974. Faulkner was forced to resign as leader of the Unionist party in January 1974, a state of emergency was declared by the British secretary of state for Northern Ireland, and the Stormont power-sharing experiment collapsed in May of that year. Substantive elements of Republican opinion were reticent in their acceptance of the Sunningdale accord.

Twenty-five years on, the Good Friday agreements give more flesh to the Sunningdale power-sharing principles, but the structural conditions for consociationalism in the territory have not improved dramatically. Nevertheless and despite vociferous opposition to the accord from a sizeable chunk of the Unionist community and the painfully slow implementation of the agreement, there is little doubt that a seismic shift has occurred in Unionist feeling, which enabled Protestant voters to accept a number of new principles for the first time in their history. 676,966 Northern Irish women and men voted for the agreement in a poll where 81 percent of registered voters turned out. The 71 percent “Yes” vote was made up of virtually the entire Nationalist vote, but more importantly, a majority (albeit only a bare majority) of the Unionist vote. The largest Unionist party (the UUP) campaigned against ferocious internal opposition for a “Yes” vote. Therefore, a majority of Unionist voters and politicians representing the largest strand of Unionist thinking have grudgingly accepted three important institutional tenets: first, power sharing between Catholics and Protestants in government, an arrangement in 1999 from which realistically there is no turning back; second, the involvement of the Republic of Ireland in some areas of Northern Irish sociocultural and political affairs; and third, ground has been given to the principle of the possibility of constitutional change in the status of the north.

There is little question that there has been substantive political progress and a shift in thinking on both sides of the divide, but the question remains: Why has there been progress? What new conditions facilitated such growing accommodation and allowed a window to open for a constitutional settlement? These explanations stem not from a radical alteration in the structural dynamics of the northern Irish conflict but from a cocktail of internal and external pressures, which have engendered a significant psychological change in the mindset of both Irish and British politicians and voters.

THE ALTERED CONTEXT FOR PEACE

The comparative literature on political transitions has focused on the withering of authoritarian regimes and their eventual replacement by democratic or pseudo-democratic multiparty competitive regimes in the developing world. But the nature and trajectory of elite-pacting and negotiations in the north of Ireland bear a striking resemblance to many of the experiences in third wave democratizing states. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter note that many successful transitions in the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by "gradual instalments" rather than "dramatic events."¹³ At the heart of such pacts between the representatives of communities in conflict are arrangements that seek to reassure each group that their vital interests are protected and that future conflict will be regulated by institutional arrangements. Such elite-pacting occurs when a number of contextual factors align themselves favorably, and the Northern Irish experience fits clearly into the realm of transplacement,¹⁴ or *ruptforma*,¹⁵ or extrication,¹⁶ where both ancien régime and opposition reach a stalemate where neither is strong enough to defeat the other militarily; moderates on both sides realize their dependence on each other for a settlement.¹⁷ Successful transplacements are characterized by the confluence of internal and external factors, bringing government and opposition to the negotiating table to ultimately massage an institutional settlement to by-pass the political impasse.

The Internal Dimension

As recognized by the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize committee, a crucial element of the Northern Irish Peace process of the 1990s was the agency and maturation of leadership on both the Unionist and Nationalist side. John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, had labored in the peaceful wilderness for many years, but his risk-taking opened many of the doors that led to the Good Friday agreement. In 1987, he was vilified on all sides for beginning a process of dialogue with Gerry Adams and the Sinn Féin leadership. But the emergence of Sinn Féin as a force pressing for constitutional change (indeed, at times, threatening the SDLP's electoral dominance within the Nationalist community) enabled the

¹³ Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions to Democracy: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 37.

¹⁴ See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 114.

¹⁵ This is Huntington's term for Linz's concept. See Juan Linz, "Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration" in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978), 35.

¹⁶ See Donald Share and Scott Mainwaring, "Transitions Through Transaction: Democratization in Brazil and Spain" in Wayne Selcher, ed., *Political Liberalization in Brazil: Dynamics, Dilemmas, and Future Prospects* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), 177–179.

¹⁷ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 151–163.

peace talks to progress. Hume's initiatives led to the IRA cease-fire of 1994 and the subsequent Good Friday agreement.

There will be no peace in the six counties without the acquiescence of the Provisional Irish Republican Army; and Sinn Féin is for all intents and purposes the wing of the IRA that will bring the military men into the constitutional arena. Gerry Adams has for many years been at the forefront of innovation in Republican circles. He evolved from an IRA commander to a charismatic political leader, cajoling suspicious Nationalists that this time a cessation of hostilities might bring real results, rather than just diminish IRA capacity to injure their opponents.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in many ways the future of the peace process is dependent upon the forces of moderate, comparatively enlightened, Unionism led by David Trimble. In a very short space of time, Trimble has reinvented himself from being a sectarian exclusionist to something more akin to a nation-building realist. Similar to former Prime Minister F. W. de Klerk in South Africa, Trimble recognized the inevitability of change, the futility of trying to hold on to all in a zero-sum game, and the opportunity to plunge into change with Unionists shaping the agenda. The nature and agency of his leadership of the Ulster Unionist party since 1995 can be dramatically juxtaposed with the failed settlements of 1921 and 1973. In 1921, Unionist leaders such as James Craig and Edward Carson were still riding the tiger of sectarian populism that they had unleashed the decade before to fight against a united and independent Irish State. The Orange Order had exploded in membership, and in 1913 the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force had been set up to agitate against Irish Home Rule. On the Nationalist side, constitutionalist leaders such as Joe Devlin and John Redmond had their power usurped by the post-1916 reawakening of Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers. Sinn Féin broached no compromise with the Unionists, and thus the politics of violent sectarian attacks left little room for a negotiated state that would include both minorities and majorities.

In the early 1970s a new generation of constitutional Nationalist leaders was making its presence felt. Gerry Fitt, John Hume, Paddy Devlin, and Austin Currie demonstrated both the capacity and willingness to move toward the center ground, but the entrenched Unionist leadership became split between the weak forces of moderation and the fire and brimstone forces of extremism. Unionist leaders such as Terrence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner were too steeped in the politics of Unionist domination to be able to drag their followers into a new era, and these reluctant reformers were easily overwhelmed by the demagogic anti-Catholicism of Ian Paisley and his new Democratic Unionist party (DUP).

The newfound accommodation between political elites of the 1990s has been given a fillip by the emergence of a younger generation of leaders who were tempered by the Troubles, cut their teeth in a cauldron of sectarian ha-

¹⁸ See Coogan, *The Troubles*.

tred, and felt personal loss directly. There have always been tenuous links between Loyalist and Nationalist paramilitaries; but in the late 1990s, working relationships are being formed. Alongside Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness—formerly the commander of the IRA in Derry and Sinn Féin’s chief negotiator with the British government, and currently Westminster MP for Mid-Ulster—has gained grudging respect from Unionist, British, and Irish negotiators for his ability to negotiate and deliver on IRA promises. His mirror images are David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist party (the political wing of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force) and Gary McMichael, who have been equally instrumental in brokering and maintaining an effective cease-fire on the Loyalist side. As in many other conflicts, these forty-something former combatants appear to have much in common with each other and genuine respect for their opponents’ histories and motivations. Remarkably, in many postconflict settlement negotiations (South Africa, the Middle East, and Guatemala) the former generals and guerrilla commanders are often the most able to broker the hard deals and accommodations that lie at the core of the settlement. The windows of opportunity for this new generation of politicians have been widened by the large size of the new assembly. This also enabled the Women’s Coalition to play a substantive formal role for the first time, although there are still only fourteen women in the Assembly. In general, the Northern Irish Assembly elected in 1998 is younger, more forward looking, and more culturally diverse than any legislature that came before in the province.

After thirty years of sectarian tit-for-tat violence and the deaths of over 3,400 men, women, and children (over 60 percent of them “civilians”) public exhaustion reached a tipping point in August 1998, when twenty-nine Saturday shoppers were killed by a car bomb in the Tyrone town of Omagh. The revulsion at the act of dissident IRA members of the “Real” IRA, when there was so much optimism that a political settlement might be around the corner, was so widespread that known dissident IRA supporters were hounded both north and south of the border. In the late 1990s there has been a cutting off of tacit public support for the paramilitaries on both sides of the divide. This is a dramatically different story from that of 1973, when internment, continuing Loyalist attacks on Nationalist areas, and police and military human rights abuses swelled the Provo’s ranks faster than the IRA quartermasters could supply weapons.

At the same time as the public’s exhaustion with violence grew and positive paths were taken by leaders, a number of the core reasons that Protestants cite to support their hostility to reunification with the south are declining in apparent legitimacy. On a social and economic level, northern Protestants have good reason to find the south a lot more attractive than they did in the 1970s or 1980s. For the first fifty years of Northern Ireland’s existence, Unionists saw themselves atop an economic workhorse that delivered material benefits, which the impoverished agricultural south could only envy. Henry Patterson notes that at the time of the Home Rule bill going through Westminster, Unionists gave

ideological emphasis “to the economically disastrous and socially regressive effects of a Dublin parliament dominated by the interests of peasants and other ‘anti-industrial’ elements.”¹⁹ However, over the last twenty-five years this perception has been shattered.

Much has been written about the Irish Republic’s economic miracle, which earned Ireland the mantle of emerald tiger of the European Union and brought citizens of the south substantial benefits in standard of living and employment opportunities. Historically, the north was the industrial power-house—with ship-building, chemical industries, and car manufacturing. But since the 1970s, these core sectors have collapsed while the “country cousins” to the south have attracted high-tech science and communication industries and excelled in the telephone and computer service businesses. In the early 1990s, per capita GDP in the south rose above that of the north for the first time; and between 1988–1994, the Republic registered on average a GDP growth rate of 4.7 percent, while it was only 1.6 percent in the north.²⁰ Since then, the disparity between southern growth and northern stagnation has become more pronounced. In 1996 and 1997, Ireland registered growth rates of 7.4 percent and 9.8 percent and became the fastest growing economy of all Western industrialized nations. In the same time period, the north could only manage less than 3 percent. Importantly, over the last few years a number of the leading Ulster banks have been sold to rival corporations in Dublin and on the continent.²¹

Simultaneously, the Republic has become less religious and more liberal in many of its legal and social practices. Divorce became legal for the first time in 1995, after a popular referendum; while the ban on abortion remains, the Irish government no longer precludes women from travelling to the UK for the procedure and has opened up its educational policies on abortion and family planning. Church attendance has been in free fall in the 1990s. In 1990, 81 percent attended church at least once a week, while in 1994 that figure had declined to 67 percent, and all indications are that it has declined still further since then.²²

The External Dimension

There is little doubt that the peace process of the 1990s reflects a new sense of interest, emergency, and commitment on behalf of the world outside of Belfast. For the first time, in the 1990s there was an intersection between politicians in Westminster and Dublin who proactively engaged themselves in trying to end the troubles. John Major reorientated British policy with the Downing Street

¹⁹ Henry Patterson, “Northern Ireland 1921–1968” in Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow, eds., *Northern Ireland Politics* (London: Longman, 1996), 4.

²⁰ Jonathan Haughton, “The Dynamics of Economic Change” in William Crotty and David E. Schmitt, eds., *Ireland and the Politics of Change* (London: Longman, 1996), 30.

²¹ Author’s interview with Michael McLoughlin of the AIB Bank, Dublin, January 1999.

²² Niamh Hardiman and Christopher Whelan, “Changing Values” in William Crotty and David E. Schmitt, eds., *Ireland and the Politics of Change* (London: Longman, 1996), 72.

Declaration in 1993, although he subsequently retreated from his progressive stance when the fragility of his Conservative majority in the House of Commons laid him at the mercy of the Ulster Unionists, who were more than happy to twist his arm over dealings with Sinn Féin. With the election of the first Labour government in Britain for eighteen years, the situation shifted back in favor of a political settlement. The Unionists no longer had any leverage in Westminster, and Prime Minister Tony Blair brought a genuine interest in accommodating the Nationalist minority that had been absent from all previous British governments—both Conservative and Labour. Both Major and Blair had a personal interest in finding a solution to the troubles of Northern Ireland, but there is little doubt that their statesmanship was given a fillip by the tide of high-profile peace settlements in Palestine, South Africa, and elsewhere.

In Dublin the will power at the top was even more pronounced. Two Fianna Fail Taoiseachs cast off their party's historical all-or-nothing approach and facilitated substantive negotiations. Albert Reynolds placed Northern Ireland at the top of his agenda and did more than anyone else to nudge the process along during his three years in office (1992–1995). Two years later, his successor as leader of Fianna Fail and Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, picked up the reins where Reynolds had let them fall and facilitated the Peace Forum negotiations, the massive vote in favor of dropping the Republic's constitutional claim on the six counties, and the setting up of the Assembly in 1999. Tim Pat Coogan notes that the agency of political leadership in Westminster and Dublin was supplemented by Irish and British civil servants who behind the scenes pushed hard for dialogue. Reynolds relied on senior bureaucrats such as Dermot Nally, Sean O'hUiginn, Martin Mansergh, and Noel Durr;²³ while in the Northern Irish Office, Sir John Chilcott and Quentin Thomas were perceived in Dublin and Belfast to be part of the solution and no longer part of the problem.²⁴ Interestingly, Chilcott went on to be a member of the Jenkins Commission on Electoral Reform in the United Kingdom and Thomas was the chief secretary to the commission.

In 1922 and the early 1970s, such positive agency to find a solution was not apparent in either Dublin or Westminster. At the time of partition it was surprising how the issue of the oath of allegiance to the British Crown overshadowed the issue of partition in the Free State, and the British government demonstrated its lack of interest in assuaging minority fears in the north by killing off the boundary commission in very short order. In 1973, the Irish government remained engaged but largely impotent, while the British government was positively disinterested in sorting out the "Irish question." On the very eve of the crucial Sunningdale conference, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland William Whitelaw, who it was generally felt had made a positive contribution to discussions, was replaced by Francis Pym, who had no background in the prov-

²³ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 421–422.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 444.

ince or the issues. The Tory government was also reticent about using the British Army to face down militant Unionists when it had been so recently embarrassed in Rhodesia. In southern Africa, army units effectively mutinied rather than fight the white Rhodesian unilateral declaration of independence.

In America, the much vaunted “greening of the White House” cannot be underestimated in its effect on the trajectory of the Northern Irish peace process of the 1990s. Bill Clinton was sympathetic to the Irish lobby before his election to the presidency in 1992 because of ancestral ties, his student days in Oxford at the beginnings of the civil rights movement in the six counties, and the political expediency of playing to the Democrats’ traditional Irish-American constituency. His active interest in a peaceful settlement continued throughout his presidency, leading to a number of important breakthroughs. Clinton began the rehabilitation of Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin as negotiation partners by allowing Adams a visa to enter the United States twice in 1994 and 1995. At the same time, two Clinton appointees had great agency in nudging along the peace process. Jean Kennedy Smith was influential as a “nationalist leaning” U.S. ambassador to Ireland, while former Senator George Mitchell progressed from being a special adviser to the president for economic initiatives in Ireland to the chair of the peace forum negotiations of 1997–1998. Compare this to the blindness that the United States had to Irish Affairs in the 1920s and 1970s. In the aftermath of the Great War in 1922, American isolationism was far too prevalent for President Warren Harding to be overly troubled by what was happening in Ireland; and in the early 1970s, the U.S. State Department remained far too Anglophilic to press President Richard Nixon to support the civil rights marchers of the north.²⁵ By 1973, Nixon had other things on his mind.

Over the last decade, Europe as a whole has become part of the equation of Northern Ireland’s constitutional status. It is apparent that increased European integration on social, economic, legal, and political fronts has both weakened concepts of national sovereignty and brought the Irish and British governments closer together in terms of economic and social harmonization. The idea that national borders no longer have the power to fan the flames of jingoism²⁶ is somewhat removed from Anglo-Celtic reality (let alone Balkan reality). But closer European political union comes on the coattails of developing economic union, and this does blur the lines of distinction between autonomous governments in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, and Great Britain. While Ulster Unionists are perhaps even less Europeanist than their anti-European colleagues in the British Conservative party, Nationalist politicians in the north do perceive European union as a means of deemphasizing the border without massive internal political upheaval. As John Hume argued in 1989, closer European union would transform the Irish border from a rigid national divide to

²⁵ See Coogan, *The Troubles*, chap. 12.

²⁶ See Jonathan Stevenson, “Peace in Northern Ireland: Why Now?” *Foreign Policy* 111 (Fall 1998): 41–54.

one which “will be no more in reality than a county boundary.”²⁷ Many senior Catholic business people in the north see closer European economic union as preferable to simple reunification with the south.

The pace of the decentralization of power to nationalities in the United Kingdom provides a context for both autonomy in the north and consensual style politics as opposed to the old game of winner takes all. Parliaments with not unsubstantial powers will be elected in Scotland and Wales this year, while a new London Assembly will take on many of the tasks of running a capital city that is over five times as large as Northern Ireland. Each assembly will be elected by forms of proportional representation, and coalition governments are likely in all three legislatures. The more Tony Blair’s Labour government moves away from the traditional unitary British state, the less likely Unionist politicians in the north will be able to resist constitutional change in their own corner of the kingdom. In 1922, Europe was a nonissue, and the British state was one of the most unitary in the democratic world. By 1973, European integration had reached the agenda, but an embryonic European Economic Community did little to weaken the claims of Dublin and Westminster over the six counties. Furthermore, devolution, while strongly supported in parts of Scotland and Wales, did not receive enough widespread support in referendums to ensure passage in the late 1970s.

The Conscious and Unconscious Realization of Inevitability

A key element of the Good Friday agreement was the British government’s formal acceptance of the principle that the people of the six counties could reunify with the Irish Republic if a majority voted for such a course of action. Thus, if one accepts the premise that Catholics/Nationalists would on the whole vote for reunification and Protestants/Unionists would by and large vote for the retention of union with Britain, the \$64,000 question becomes when will the Catholic electorate reach parity of numbers with the Protestants?

When the Irish Free State was established in 1922, only six counties of Ulster’s nine remained part of the United Kingdom, and only four of these—Antrim, Down, Armagh, and Londonderry—had Unionist majorities. The other three counties of Ulster—Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan—had Protestant populations of less than 25 percent. Including all nine in the new province would have given the Protestants only a slight 55-45 percent numerical majority in the north. Even Fermanagh and Tyrone, which were included in the six, had Catholic majorities and had voted for Home Rule in 1910. This six-county solution gave a 66-34 percent split in favor of the Unionists in 1920.

Since that time Catholics have demonstrated a higher birth rate than their Protestant neighbors, but greater Catholic emigration from the province offset this numerical advantage. Paul Doherty notes that between 1937 and 1951, 58

²⁷ Ibid., 43

percent of the net outmovements were by Catholics,²⁸ and that imbalance continued throughout the worst of the troubles in the 1970s and 1980s. In censuses between 1926 and 1981, the Catholic proportion of the province never rose above 35 percent; but in the last official census of 1991, the flow of emigration had eased and the Catholic proportion of the province approached 40 percent for the first time (Unionists 51 percent, Catholics 38 percent, not stated/no religion 11 percent). It is reasonable to split the not stated-no religion category down the middle when it comes to speculating where united Ireland versus United Kingdom votes might go. As these respondents are concentrated in the upper-middle class areas of Belfast and Castlereagh, this would give a Unionist-Nationalist split of 56-44. But over the last decade, there is every indication that a burgeoning Catholic middle class is at the forefront of a slowly growing Nationalist population, and the margin of difference between the two communities is growing smaller by the day. Although Catholic fertility rates have declined since the 1970s, in 1991 they remained 40 percent higher than Protestants; 60 percent of the voters coming of age in 2005–2009 will be from Catholic backgrounds.²⁹ Catholics will continue to constitute a majority of new voters. Demographic predictions in the 1970s foresaw the year 2010 as the earliest date that a Catholic majority might occur in the province. Even if this date overestimated the speed of Catholic growth, the indicators imply that parity between the communities will be reached sooner rather than later. Even the rider of higher Catholic outmigration appears to be no longer valid, as Protestant teenagers are increasingly heading for mainland British universities and not returning.³⁰

It should, however, be noted that the simple assumption that Nationalists would vote for reunification and Unionists would vote for retaining the union is not a given. Although Nationalist self-identification is rising and Catholic support for remaining within the UK has reached a low of 20 percent in 1998, only 48 percent of Catholics explicitly supported reunification in 1998, and only 3 percent of Protestants supported reunification.³¹ Nevertheless, the trajectory of emboldened and growing support for reunification is apparent.

Such guestimates are borne out by the voting patterns in the 1997 parliamentary elections and 1998 assembly elections in the province. In 1997, Unionist parties won 48 percent of the vote, Nationalist 40 percent, and others 12 percent. That division held in 1998, when Unionists won 47 percent, Nationalists 40 percent, and others 13 percent. The bulk of votes in the “others” column in 1998 was for parties such as the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition—neither group implacably opposed to

²⁸ Paul Doherty, “The Numbers Game: The Demographic Context of Politics” in Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow, eds., *Northern Ireland Politics* (London: Longman, 1996), 205.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁰ See Coogan, *The Troubles*, 514; and Doherty, “The Numbers Game,” 206.

³¹ See John Curtice and Lizanne Dowds, “Has Northern Ireland Really Changed” (Paper presented at the 1999 American Political Science Association meetings, 2–5 September 1999, Atlanta, Georgia).

closer ties with the Republic. Compare these figures with the fact that in the Assembly elections of June 1973, at the height of Catholic flight from sectarian attacks, the Nationalist SDLP could only muster 23 percent of the popular vote. Admittedly, the Provisional IRA had called for a boycott; but, as Coogan notes, this call was largely ignored except in Republican ghetto areas.³² Thus it is reasonable to assume that with social stability the two traditional communities will reach parity within the next couple of decades, and at that time a majority vote for reunification becomes far more plausible. John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary proffer that the “growth of the cultural Catholic population may beckon a united (presumably confederal or federal) Ireland within three decades.”³³ Unionist leaders will have made these very same calculations. It is likely that much of the accommodation that is now inching forward the peace process is prompted by the realities of electoral demographics, which are creeping up on Unionists like a sword of Damacles. Doherty notes that the Unionist “perception” that they are about to be outnumbered by Nationalists is often more important to their political posture than the reality of the demographic situation.³⁴

The belief that the Good Friday agreement is the precursor to more monumental structural reform rests on the favorable conditions that have manifested themselves in the province. But the argument is bolstered by a review of comparative history—an analysis of change in other states where minorities and majorities have clashed over the reigns of power and the affiliations of flag and anthem. When set beside transitions in South Africa and Zimbabwe, there is almost an historical inevitability about the reunification of Ireland. In both African cases, as in many others, transitional power-sharing political arrangements were used to smooth the way between the old dispensation and the new. While we should be cautious not to invest too much determinism from what has happened elsewhere into what might happen in Ireland, it would be equally short-sighted to pass over the lessons of other conflictual polities wherever they may have been.

LESSONS FROM OTHER TRANSITIONS WITHIN COMMUNALLY DIVIDED SOCIETIES

While here I focus on two southern African cases, there are also parallels with other transitional experiences in divided societies—notably the evolving Palestine-Israel accommodation and the measures taken to try and assuage independence desires in the Basque and Catalan regions of Spain. The bumpy road to peace in Palestine-Israel may be far from its end, but the component factors that gave the initial momentum to the peace process were akin to those in

³² Coogan, *The Troubles*, 193.

³³ John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 403.

³⁴ Doherty, “The Numbers Game,” 200.

Northern Ireland; and the subsequent political arrangements have always been explicitly transitional. Palestinian authority over Jericho and the Gaza Strip in 1993 evolved into much broader administrative responsibility over both the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1997. Today there is a widespread expectation that the United Nations two-state approach will be realized with an independent Palestinian state nestling against Israel. The cocktail of internal and external variables that gave rise to the peace process was as potent as those of Ireland, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat provided the accommodatory leadership in the early 1990s, which was facilitated by proactive Norwegian and American intervention and the often constructive role of King Hussein of Jordan. The exhaustion with the conflict—after Israel had been in a state of war during its entire fifty year existence and six years of the Palestinian *intifada*—may be less obvious; but it is clear that by the early 1990s neither side could envision a solely military solution to their problems. The Basque and Catalan regions of Northern Spain are a somewhat different case. There, linguistic and cultural minorities, geographically concentrated, have long sought a degree of independence from the Spanish nation state; but substantial decentralization of administrative and legislative power since 1979 has kept the lid on the pressure cooker of secessionism.

Clearly, African experiences are very different from those of Western Europe. Northern Ireland's dominant group is a numerical majority, while whites were in a small minority in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, it is useful to apply the comparative case study technique to Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe, and South Africa in the precise area of their negotiated settlements and constitutional designs to understand more about Northern Ireland's likely trajectory. In essence, all three cases demonstrate the classical elements of transplacement with a dominant group and opposition involved in bringing about constitutional change. In all three cases, the elite negotiators agreed to some degree upon consensual power-sharing arrangements. But in the two informative historical cases of South Africa and Zimbabwe, those power-sharing arrangements were ultimately temporary and the precursor to deeper structural constitutional change.

Although a world apart economically and geographically, South Africa and Zimbabwe both experienced similar processes to that of Northern Ireland, consisting of negotiations to find a political accommodation between majorities and minorities.³⁵ There have also long been parallels drawn between the nature of communal conflict in Northern Ireland and South Africa, and there have long been more practical links between Afrikaners and Orangemen in North Ireland. The psychology of the Unionist is akin to that of the conservative Afrikaner: "chosen people," stoic, threatened, and misunderstood. A less obvious connection between the two countries began with Michael Collins in the late

³⁵ For a detailed account of the transition in each country, see Andrew Reynolds, *Electoral Systems and Democratization in Southern Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), chaps. 5 and 6.

1910s, when he quite deliberately copied Afrikaner guerrilla tactics, which had proved so effective against the might of the British army in the Boer War. Much later, South Africa supplied arms to Loyalist paramilitaries in 1988, with British army complicity.³⁶ While the similarities between the historic conflicts of identity are manifest in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, more important to our discussions are the parallels between the peace processes and resulting institutional arrangements. The cocktail of pressures on the ancien régime to reform and the excluded to negotiate may have been different in mix in each of the three cases, but they were very similar in substance. In Zimbabwe at the end of the 1970s, South Africa in the early 1990s, and Northern Ireland in the mid-late 1990s, the congruence of internal and external pressures and the resulting change in mindset of those in power combined to give birth to fragile peace processes.

Internal Dimensions

The positive agency of established political leaders and their willingness to take risks were key to progress in South Africa and Zimbabwe, just as it has been in Northern Ireland. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela and F. W. De Klerk were “chained together”³⁷ in their uneasy alliance to deliver the country from apartheid. The leader of the South African Communist Party, Joe Slovo, was the only African National Congress (ANC) figure who could broach and then sell the sunset power-sharing clause to his constituency. The clause entrenched a government of National Unity and protected civil servant jobs for a limited period. Even Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom party, demonstrated a modicum of nation-building sincerity by entering into the South African national elections ten days before the poll in 1994. In Zimbabwe, the peace process was carried on by the only leaders who could seriously claim to represent the bulk of the population—Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, and Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, who realized he had no choice but to take his white tribe into a new and uncertain country.

Just as in Ireland, the South African peace process was heavily dependent on a new generation of politicians who were in their mid-forties and saw little future in prolonged conflict. Cyril Ramaphosa of the African National Congress and Roelf Meyer of the National party were the architects commissioned by Mandela and De Klerk to build the new constitutional dispensation. In Zimbabwe, a new generation of leadership was less apparent as many of the established leaders (Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe) were only in their forties or

³⁶ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 310. For an overview of the parallels between Northern Ireland and South Africa, see Hermann Giliomee and Jannie Gagiano, eds., *The Elusive Search for Peace: South Africa, Israel, Northern Ireland* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁷ See David Ottaway, *Chained Together: Mandela, De Klerk, and the Struggle to Remake South Africa* (New York: Random House, 1993); and Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

early fifties. In South Africa, the paramilitaries who brought their followers into the fold were Chris Hani, the commander of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the ANC's military wing) and General Constand Viljoen of the Afrikaner Freedom Front. The role of the public's exhaustion with violence was as marked in South Africa and Zimbabwe as it was in Northern Ireland. After years of social protest and state violence, South Africans were dying at the rate of 300 a month in politically related deaths throughout 1990 to 1994. The lawlessness of the collapsing state was impinging on previously closeted white South Africans on a much more daily basis. In Zimbabwe, the peace process only took hold after a full decade of civil war and the deaths of over 100,000 combatants and civilians.

The breakdown in the most polarized forms of cultural demonization in South Africa was even more precipitant to the peace process than it was in Northern Ireland. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, black and white South Africans began slowly to meet each other and recognize bonds of history, culture, and nationalism. The South Africa Broadcasting Company began to show reruns of the American *Cosby Show*, which presented to white South Africa for the first time a portrait of a successful black middle class family. The elite negotiators found they had much in common; and bridges were built during the first few years of tentative negotiations, which were subsequently crossed when agreements were made in 1993. The ending of some of the manifestations of petty apartheid (the desegregation of beaches, transport, theaters, etc.) in the 1980s may not have substantively improved the lives of the disenfranchised majority, but they created the perception of slow reform. In tandem, throughout the covert and overt negotiations of the 1980s and 1990s, the ANC's stance was often aimed at reassuring the white community that their interests would not be ploughed under an avalanche of change.

External Dimensions

As in Ireland, accommodations in southern Africa were only achieved when favorable internal conditions intersected with increasing external pressure for change. The end of the cold war removed much of the apartheid regime's rationale for demonizing the incipient communism of the frontline states. It became no longer credible to send young white conscripts to fight the red terror in Angola, Namibia, or Mozambique; and the fall of Smith's regime in Rhodesia had completed a blanket of hostility to the white regime that stretched across their border from the Atlantic to the Indian ocean. The West was increasing its economic and social sanctions in the 1980s, and sympathetic ears for the white regime were becoming few and far between. The sporting and cultural isolation was hard to bear for a community possessed by sport and proud of its artistic, dramatic, and scholarly achievements. In Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s, economic sanctions had largely failed to bring about a weakening in the government's bullishness to hold out against all reform. But the fall of the Salazar regime in Portugal, the new Portuguese government's withdrawal from Mo-

zambique, and the subsequent coming to power of Samora Machel in Mozambique provided a base for guerrillas to hit the Rhodesian army almost at will. By the late 1970s, even President Machel was pressuring Mugabe and Nkomo to negotiate, for Mozambique was feeling the effects of the economic sanctions on Rhodesia.

Just as in Northern Ireland, the ancien régimes in Pretoria and Salisbury woke up to the realization of the surety of change, even if it was on a subconscious level. They decided to try and mold the process rather than risk being removed from power completely. In South Africa at the beginning of negotiations, the government was based on 15 percent of the population and declining, the economy was starting to crack under the pressures of international sanctions, and the internal violence was becoming unmanageable. In Zimbabwe, the government was based on 3 percent of the people (and falling), the economy could not survive forever under the weight of international sanctions, and the army was losing the battle to contain insurgents. Christine Sylvester quotes the head of Rhodesian intelligence as saying, “from a winning position between 1964 and 1972, Rhodesian forces were entering the stage of a no-win war, which lasted from December 1972 to 1976; after that they were fighting a losing war.”³⁸

Institutionalized Power Sharing as a Sunset Clause

The parallels of the trajectories of political reform in Northern Ireland and our two southern African cases are mirrored in the institutional arrangements that emanated from the respective peace process negotiations. A similar confluence of favorable conditions facilitated a political settlement in each country, and that settlement revolved around recognizing minority community interests and weakening the winner-take-all aspects of the electoral state. Each new dispensation included the voices of minority groups over and above their mere numerical proportions of the population. But history shows that the power-sharing arrangements that brought a reduction of conflict to South Africa and Zimbabwe were ultimately temporary and were used as transitional mechanisms to move the state to something quite different. O'Donnell and Schmitter note that in most cases such institutional pacts are “regarded as temporary solutions,” and commonly consensual formulas “only last for a while and then lead to a more egalitarian, individualistic, competitive, and broadly accountable democratic outcome.”³⁹ The transitory nature of institutional power sharing in South Africa and Zimbabwe may not have been a positive thing. Zimbabwe in particular has lapsed into a de facto one-party state since the removal of its consensus institutions. But the key point is that they were transitory, and thus it is logical to believe that Northern Ireland's power-sharing arrangements will be ultimately transitory, too.

³⁸ Christine Sylvester, *Zimbabwe: The Terrain of Contradictory Development* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 50.

³⁹ O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions to Democracy*, 41.

South Africa's interim constitution of 1994 was semiconsensual but did not display as high a number of obvious consociational characteristics as the Good Friday agreement. A mandated power-sharing executive—Government of National Unity—included all parties who had won over 5 percent of the seats in parliament; and the second largest party, the National party, was awarded one of the deputy presidency positions. The electoral system was the purest form of PR to be found in the world, and seven parties gained representation—four of them with less than 3 percent of the vote. There was a minority veto in the Constitutional Assembly, as clauses within the permanent constitution had to receive a two-thirds majority for passage. Outside of the institutional regime there was a high degree of economic pacting between representatives of white business and the black elite. But the constitution remained unitary and without provisions for communal segmental autonomy, that is, there was no *Volkstaat* or special legal privileges reserved for Afrikaners. In Zimbabwe, the constitutional dispensation introduced by the agreement brokered by the British government between the Rhodesian regime and the liberation forces proved to be restrained majority rule. There was no mandated power-sharing executive, but ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) in the interests of a smooth transition appointed both members of the opposition ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) and independent white politicians to the cabinet. The first multiparty elections in 1980 were conducted under list PR, and 20 percent of the seats in parliament were reserved for whites. To an even greater extent than in South Africa, much of the power sharing went on outside of the electoral sphere in pacts between the black-dominated political sphere and the white-owned economic sphere.

However, the inclusive institutional arrangements in both countries were fairly quickly scaled back to create something much more akin to restrained majoritarianism (in the case of South Africa) and fully blown majoritarianism (in Zimbabwe). The permanent constitution adopted by the South African parliament in 1996, implemented after the elections of 1999, did away with the mandated Government of National Unity and entrenched no minority veto for regular legislation. Nevertheless, the inclusive PR system remained for the 1999 elections, albeit with a promise to review the situation for the elections of 2004. In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe moved as far away from the Lancaster House constitutional inclusion as he possibly could. He switched the electoral system back to first past the post in 1985, made himself president rather than prime minister, and abolished the whites-only reserved seats in 1987. The only form of power sharing that remains today in Zimbabwe is the undemocratic economic pacting of white and black elites that has protected not merely white wealth, but also enriched the senior ZANU leadership.

CONCLUSION

If the new institutional arrangements in Northern Ireland are taken to be transitional—a sunset clause to smooth the passage to more fundamental change—

then the crucial question for Ireland's future becomes, transitional to what? For many reasons, a return to the status quo of Unionist hegemony that existed before 1998 is no longer an option. That would simply not be accepted by any party to the conflict outside of the extreme wing of the Unionists. The British, Irish, and American governments would not accept such a retreat at this stage, and the violence that would break out from the Nationalist community within the six counties would no doubt be more serious than the worst of the troubles. But there are a multitude of alternatives to simple reunification of the north and south that have been proffered. However, the case for any of these alternatives coming to fruition is weaker than the case that the Good Friday power-sharing arrangements are ultimately likely to lead to a united Ireland.

The primary alternatives to reunification (or a return to the pre-1998 status quo of direct rule from Westminster) are threefold. First is self-government for the six counties under the sovereign umbrella of the United Kingdom. This is what the Good Friday agreement winks toward, although the current proposals stop short of unfettered home rule. Second is independence within Europe (the Scottish National party option), which envisions Northern Ireland as an independent state with close ties to the European Union in economic and social affairs. Third is joint British and Irish sovereignty over the province. The problem is that just about nobody in the province wants the second or third options, and home rule for Northern Ireland only has a chance if it operates on the basis of a broad minority-majority pact. A broad power-sharing pact in the Northern Irish context is inherently transitional to something else. The idea of independence within Europe appeals to some leading Catholic and Protestant business people in Derry and Belfast, but to both Nationalists and Loyalists it is a very poor second choice against achieving their ultimate aim. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the struggling six-county unit in the north would survive as anything approaching an independent economic entity. Similarly, joint British and Irish sovereignty pleases no one unless the Nationalists see it as a transitional arrangement before reunification.

If the Good Friday power-sharing arrangements are not set in stone for all time, then reunification is the logical end step of the current process. Clearly, there has been a degree of subconscious Unionist acceptance of the inevitability of change, although it is equally clear that moderate Unionist leaders do not believe that reunification will be the end point of the process that they helped unleash. But the same was true in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Neither F. W. De Klerk nor Ian Smith believed that they were simply handing over power to the disenfranchised minority when they initiated negotiations in their respective states. Both felt they could actually manipulate the process to keep their parties' government with the backing of more malleable parts of the previously excluded majority.⁴⁰ But neither De Klerk nor Smith understood the juggernaut they had set rolling, and it is possible that Ulster Unionist party leader David

⁴⁰ See Reynolds, *Electoral Systems and Democratization in Southern Africa*.

Trimble is laboring under the same mistake. The optimist might also point to the possibility of the 1998 power-sharing institutions having a moderating and integrating effect on the leadership of the two communities in the north. If a majority vote for reunification is twenty-five years away, the power-sharing lesson might make neighbors less distrustful. However, the issue of demographic change remains the key. If constitutional Nationalists have enough votes to bring about reunification, they will use them as soon as they have the opportunity. At that stage the question becomes whether unity is bloody or peaceful, and that will be determined by the events of the next quarter of a century.

There are three main options to what a reunified Ireland might look like politically. First, the six counties of the north could be reincorporated into the existing unitary Irish Republic without any special arrangements for that part of the island that was formerly British. Second, reunification could spur the creation of a confederal Ireland based on parliaments in the four historic provinces. Sinn Féin policy from 1972 to 1982 was to pursue the federal Ireland option. Third, there might be a package of consensual institutions built into the Republic's constitution to placate their returning citizens: asymmetrical federalism, a more powerful regionally based second chamber, and some degree of cultural legal autonomy. This is perhaps the most likely shape of any future united Ireland, as the first option would not be countenanced by even moderate Unionists and the second would involve a sharp reduction in Dublin's power, which might be a little further than the capital city politicians want to take the whole matter.*

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