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On the Development of the Concept of Consociational Democracy and its Adequacy for Resolving Sectarian Conflicts: Northern Ireland and Lebanon as Case Studies

Azmi Bishara | June 2018

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Abstract

This paper** explores the theoretical model behind the concept of "consociational democracy", beginning with its roots in the Austrian Marxist tradition to its elaboration in 1969 by the Dutch-American political scientist Arend Lijphart. Lijphart's work was part of his wider critique of Gabriel Almond's categorization of Western political systems. This study presents a structural criticism of the term "consociational democracy" and its usage, arguing that the practice of "consociational democracy" was born of pragmatic policies before maturing into a theoretical model. It further argues that the subsequent contributions by Lijphart were an extrapolation from a set of country case studies that lack an underlying "theory" and that "power sharing" does not necessarily lead to democratization. The study thus draws up several theoretical observations that help distinguish "consociationalism" from "consociational democracy". Finally, the paper contrasts the suitability of this theoretical model in the case of Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

Keywords: Consociational Democracy; Arend Lijphart; Power Sharing; Mutual Veto; Heterogeneous Societies.

** This text is part of a chapter in the author's book *Al-Ta'if, Al-Ta'ifiya, Al-Tawa'if Al-Mutakhayyila* ("Sect, Sectarianism, Imagined Sects") published by the ACRPS in April 2018.

Introduction: From the Individual to the Group

The concept of consociationalism represents a point of intersection for political solutions that take the representation of collective identities into consideration when using the electoral system, the formation of coalitions, and at times portioning the entire political system to bring about stability and avoid conflict and civil war.

Models of consociationalism appeared in practice at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, initially in Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Austria, predominantly multinational and multilingual states, in an endeavor to bring about stability in a political framework not confined to "majoritarian democracy" in which ethnic minorities risk being marginalized. Based on these specific experiences and their development, political thinkers since the 1950s and 1960s have constructed the idea of consociational democracy. Prominent among them are Gerhard Lehmbruch, Gabriel A. Almond, and Arend Lijphart. Lijphart in particular specialized and investigated this model, and following the emergence of new case studies, introduced modifications to what is now deemed a theory.

Consociationalism started out as practical policies dictated by necessity, by constitutions consistent with that necessity, by historical experience and by culture, and became established in the conventions of certain states, before it became a theoretical model. This fact ought to be borne in mind before dealing with the concept as a stand-alone theory, since it has been approached as though it were a theory, even the sole model that ought to be applied in multi ethnic multi confessional states. This is despite practice having preceded theory. The various forms of consociationalism are linked to the social and political structure, circumstances, preconditions, and the prevailing political culture in the circles of political actors in each state. Some of these forms did not produce democratic consociational systems, but accords akin to cartels between the confessional, ethnic, or other elites. The most prevalent model for solving conflicts over power in a fair manner remains the democratic state based on equal citizenship and the rule of law, which might include various forms of local, regional, and cultural autonomy (i.e. that acknowledges collective rights in some cases).

The term consociationalism derives from the writing of the German philosopher Johannes Althusius (1557–1638) who used the Latin term *consociatio*.¹ Lijphart explains that this term was also used in the writings of Austrian Marxists, such as Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, at the beginning of the 20th century, in David Apter's 1961 study on Uganda², and in Arthur Lewis's 1965 work *Politics in West Africa*.³ He also refers to the use of the same term in 1967 by the German researcher Gerhard Lehmbuch in his study on proportional democracy⁴ which echoes Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy.⁵

Austrian Marxists made important contributions at the beginning of the last century – Otto Bauer⁶ and Karl Renner in particular. They pointed out the need to recognize the various nationalities in the context of multinational state and to grant them cultural autonomy on the basis of the individual person, and not regional or geographic, based on the individual's affiliation to the nation, which for them is primarily a cultural group. Such autonomy should exist in states where several nationalities with different cultures

¹ There is a debate between scholars over Althusius' place in coining this term. Some view him as the father of modern federalism, others see his thinking as an attempt to revive the corporatism of the middle ages. In either case, what must be stressed here is that Althusius started with the primacy of the group in political theorizing, not the individual. This was a historical and theoretical proposition, and, contrary to the social contract theorists, he rejected the idea of the individual without a group as the state of nature.

² David E. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda: A Study in Bureaucratic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

³ Arthur W. Lewis, *Politics in West Africa* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965).

⁴ Gerhard Lehmbuch, *Proporzdemokratie: Politisches System und Politische Kultur in der Schweiz und in Österreich* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967). The term proportional here is used in distinction from its use in the term proportional representation. Here, one is speaking of representation proportional to the relative sizes of communities, be they ethnic, confessional, or otherwise.

⁵ Arend Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy: Power Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 3-4.

⁶ Bauer's *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* appeared in Vienna in 1907 (2nd edn. 1924) and sparked wide debate and strong opposition from the Russian communists. Stalin responded to it on the express encouragement of Lenin himself. The book represented a radical change to the prevailing Marxist position on nationality by not reducing it to the question of class struggle, but rather seeing it as a cultural framework combining classes. Otto Bauer and Karl Renner's book on the conditions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a search for solutions to the nationalities' question, without delusions over the possibility to incorporate nationalities into a single nationality, and with the avoidance of the dispersion of the existing bodies and separation leading to ethnic cleansing as happened in the Balkans at the end of the 20th century. They thus formulated the idea of cultural autonomy for nationalities, i.e. personal autonomy, not linked to a defined territory. See: Otto Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, Joseph O'Donnell (trans.), (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), and in particular the first two chapters on nationality and chapter four on autonomy. See also Karl Renner's article of 1899, for which I have been unable to find an English translation: Karl Renner, "Staat und Nation," in: Karl Renner, *Schriften* (Wien: Residenz Verlag, 1994); Karl Renner, *Der Kampf der österreichischen Nationen um den Staat* (Published under the pseudonym Rudolf Spring), (Leipzig und Wien: Deuticke, 1902); Karl Renner, *Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen in besonderer Anwendung auf Österreich* (Leipzig und Wien: Deuticke, 1918).

are present together and not divided according to region or territory. In this respect, they opposed the classical Marxist orthodoxy which saw the ending of class struggle as a solution to all problems, including national conflict. They also disagreed with liberalism which does not acknowledge any legal entity between the individual and the state. In classic liberalism, rights are defined in their connection to the individual citizen, and there is no place for rights to be granted to groups within the state.

Bauer and Renner added nationality as a corporative body existing between the individual and the state which had to be recognized to preserve the unity of the multinational state. They did not believe that their model applied to religious communities or confessional affiliations other than with respect to religious rights themselves, including the administration of religious institutions and free worship. Cultural autonomy, however, was to be granted to nationalities when several were found within the same state. For this reason, Bauer opposed the granting of cultural autonomy to the Jews, which he considered a retrograde step compared with the integration that had begun to happen in modern society, whereby Jews were integrating into various European nations⁷. Thus, programs for cultural autonomy for groups within the state did not apply to religious confessions. Such groups run their religious affairs and traditions themselves, features which themselves are separate from the state in secular societies, and this is autonomy in religious affairs. Therefore, there is no talk of confessional federalism or of constitutionally mandated cultural autonomy for confessions as if they were nationalities.⁸

There is one Lebanese researcher however who takes the model of group rights based on the individual and applies it to Lebanese confession as though they were ethnic groups having created within itself group-based federalism (and not one of provinces or governorates for example). Antoine Messarra writes in *A General Theory of the Lebanese Constitutional System* that the constitution and the National Pact in Lebanon are federalist, but on a personal and not regional basis, that is through representation of confessional communities based on the citizen's religious affiliation, and by means of

⁷ For Bauer's rejection of the idea of autonomy for the Jews and his support for their assimilation, see Bauer pp. 291-308.

⁸ This is also our view, which we expressed in the book *Sect, Sectarianism, and Imagined Sects*, and beforehand in another book. See Azmi Bishara, *On the Arab Question: Foreword to an Arab Democratic Manifesto* (Beirut: ACRPS, 2007), pp. 160-2, 183-9.

sectarian autonomy in matters such as personal status and education⁹. To do this, he makes sure to differentiate between three definitions of sectarianism.

Firstly, Messarra describes the sectarian quota, whose application in an inflexible fashion leads, in his opinion, to a categorization of citizens, undermines the principle of equal opportunities, and saps the administration in the centers thus preventing them from achieving a balance and from taking decisions, because a simple majority is not enough. In his view, the quota system is present in Austria, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Malaysia, Colombia, Cyprus before partition, India, Vietnam, and elsewhere. Secondly, is the definition that autonomy in personal status matters for confessions\religions, and perhaps in education and other matters; which means a type of federalism based on the individual where the sectarian and geographic boundaries do not intersect. Third, in the negative sense of sectarianism, that is using religion to enflame conflicts¹⁰ or the exploitation of religion in political rivalry by politicians or clerics, which are problems prevailing in the Lebanese system and other Arab systems. This issue is not resolved by abolishing sectarianism in the first two senses, which constitute a different problem.

Messarra reiterates these definitions throughout his book, which consists of a number of articles and lectures. He also repeats the definition of the Lebanese Pact, which forms an organizing thread for his book. As he states, in using the term "integrative federalism" or "legislative federalism" he relies on Michel Shiha, who wrote in 1947, "The parliament represents a special model of federalism. Just as in Switzerland there are cantons, in Lebanon there are confessions. The basis of the canton is the geographic area: the basis of the confession is religious law only; that is being governed in terms of personal status."¹¹ If that were true, the Lebanese confessional system would come to an end simply by secularizing personal status laws. The question is would such a step be enough to end the sectarian system given that political sectarianism is entrenched? Does this system continue to be restricted to and depend on personal status?

⁹ Antoine Messarra, *General Theory of the Lebanese Constitutional System: Comparative Studies in Power-Sharing Systems* (Beirut: Al-Maktaba Al-Sharqiya, 2005), p. 89.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 199.

Lijphart's Consociational Theory

Lijphart began to theorize about the concept of consociational democracy in 1968 in his book *The Politics of Accommodation*¹² which investigated the Dutch case. In that study, he adopted two variables, the first of which being the social and political cleavages over issues of class and that of religion and state (including the split between Calvinists and Catholics) in Dutch society. The second was the nature and the extent to which the political elites accommodated the achievement of democratic stability. Lijphart concluded that the Netherlands ultimately achieved a stable democracy, and that the Dutch consociational model could be applied to highly fragmented societies, but on the condition that there were leaderships present who were able to come to an understanding with the groups they represented and between themselves as well¹³. This conclusion formed the core of the theory of consociational democracy, which stresses the role of the elites in leading groups but fails to provide a precise definition of the mechanism of this understanding between them or of the key elements of its implementation and ensured continuation.

In 1969, Lijphart published an article in *World Politics* entitled "Consociational Democracy"¹⁴ which is considered his classic work on the topic. Here he puts forward an alternative typology for the democratic political systems in the Western states by means of his critique of the typology proposed by Gabriel Almond in his article "Comparative Political Systems."¹⁵ Almond proposed a fourfold classification: (1) the Anglo-American (including some members of the Commonwealth); (2) the Continental European (exclusive of the Scandinavian and the Netherlands, which combine some of the features of the Continental European and the Anglo-American); (3) the pre-industrial, or partially industrial, political systems outside the European-American area; and (4) totalitarian political systems.¹⁶ This classification adopted the criteria of "political culture" and "political role structure" of the political subsystems.¹⁷ Almond linked the organization of the state according to these two criteria with political stability.¹⁸ He also

¹² Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

¹³ M.P.C.M. Van Schendelen, "Consociational Democracy: The Views of Arend Lijphart and Collected Criticisms," *Political Science Review*, vol. 14 (1985), p. 148.

¹⁴ Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," *World Politics*, vol. 21 (January 1969), pp. 207-25.

¹⁵ Gabriel A. Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 18, no. 3 (August 1956), pp. 391-409.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 392-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 393.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 393, 396; Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," p. 207.

incorporated many relevant theories and concept into this typology, such as overlapping and cross-cutting membership, party systems, separation of powers, and political development,¹⁹ which Lijphart also takes as significant factors for the analysis of consociational democracy.

With regard to the first and second type, that is the system of Western democracies, Almond classifies them into three. The first is the Anglo-American political system (which comprises the democratic system in the United States and Great Britain). The second is the Continental European (in France, Germany, and Italy), while the third comprises the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, and where Almond classified them in-between the first two types, because it combines features of both.²⁰

For Almond, the Anglo-American democratic systems are characterized by a homogeneous, secular political culture, and a role (or function) structure of the political subsystems – as represented by formal governmental agencies, political parties, interest groups, media institutions, and publics of various kinds – which is (1) highly differentiated; (2) manifest, organized, and bureaucratized; (3) characterized by a high degree of stability in the functions of the roles; and (4) likely to have a diffusion of power and influence within the political system as a whole.²¹ On the other hand, the political culture in the Continental European systems is heterogeneous and has undergone varying degrees of evolution, although it shares common roots and heritage. These fragmented cultures are also divided into separate political subcultures, since the political role structure is embedded within these subcultures and tends to constitute separate subsystems of roles. For example, the Catholic subculture has the Church itself, its schools, and its own voluntary associations such as Catholic trade unions, political parties, and media institutions. This also applies to the communist, liberal, and socialist political subcultures, which create subsystems for each subculture within the state. The result may be a state of political immobilism leading to instability.²² Polarization stymies the dynamic of evolution and at the same time leads to instability. I do not necessarily agree with this typology, particularly with respect to the homogeneity found in the United States and Great Britain. Both countries are currently subject to political conflicts that greatly resemble struggles of cultural identity and are fragmented into identity groups, especially if we consider the difference between the East and West

¹⁹ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 6.

²⁰ Almond, pp. 398, 405.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 398-9.

²² *Ibid.* pp. 405-8.

Coasts and the Midwest. This is manifestly evident in elections, particularly so in the 2016 presidential election.

The third type has features in common with both the above systems, making it difficult, in Almond's opinion, to categorize as either one or the other, and he deems this type as standing somewhere in between. He sees that the Scandinavian countries share a political role structure with the Anglo-American systems, which are marked by a high degree of autonomy, whereas Netherlands, Switzerland, and Austria, share with the Continental European systems the limited autonomy of the political subsystems. In terms of political culture, Almond suggests that for the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, a similarity with the political culture present in the Anglo-American systems, in that it is more homogeneous, more integrated and secular, and more differentiated in its traditional elements compared to the political culture in Continental European systems.²³

Lijphart opposes Almond on this point. For with the exception of the Scandinavian countries, he believes that the other countries are fragmented into subcultures, just as in the Continental European systems. In Belgium and Luxembourg there is fragmentation into *familles spirituelles* of Catholics, socialists, and liberals; in the Netherlands there are vertical cleavages between Catholics, Calvinists, socialists, and liberals; and in Austria there are camps (*Lager*) of Catholics, socialists, and nationalist liberals. On this basis, Lijphart classified Western democracies into two types: homogeneous, stable democracies (Almond's Anglo-American type)²⁴ and centrifugal democracies, which are heterogeneous.²⁵

Lijphart constructed and analyzed his theory of consociational democracy on foundations derived from the second kind of democracy mentioned above, since it is the class that contains heterogeneous states, some of which are highly stable, and others less so. He posited that it was impossible to predict whether a heterogeneous state would be politically stable based on the two variables that Almond relied upon – political culture and role structure of the political subsystems – since Austria, Switzerland, and the Low Countries are politically stable despite their many subcultures and the vertical

²³ Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," pp. 207, 208, 210, 211.

²⁴ Namely Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa; with the expansion of the Commonwealth of Nations after 1960, the name "Old Commonwealth" has been used for those states, which were part of it prior to World War II, and "New Commonwealth" for those states which became part of it after the expansion. See Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 147-8.

²⁵ Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," pp. 210, 211, 222.

cleavages among them. This is the opposite of the theory of cross-cutting cleavages when these groups overlap,²⁶ and which expects states with vertical cleavages to experience immobilism and political instability.

From this perspective, Lijphart derived an alternative model for the democratic political systems not included in the typology of Almond and others found in the literature on liberal democracy that have been unable to explain the development of these cases and the cause of their stability and continuation despite the fragmentation of their societies. These “deviant” cases are what Lijphart terms “consociational democracies” to which he adds a third variable: the degree of cooperation between the political elites.²⁷ Initially, he derived this from his study of the Dutch political system, as indicated above, but then posited a mechanism for this cooperation, namely the formation of grand coalitions that embrace all the representatives of the political elites, in a fashion that ensures a degree of political stability and prevents the country from sliding into civil war.²⁸ This is the primary key element for achieving consociational democracy. Lijphart later expanded his list of such elements.

These accords can take forms other than coalition government, including elite alliances within other governmental bodies, such as consultative, or even elected, councils and committees. In Lebanon, for example, the office of the president was not divided among the elites of the main confessions. In the Lebanese National Pact of 1943, it was agreed to divide authority between a Maronite president and a Sunni prime minister, and thereby guaranteeing the representation of the country’s two major religious groups. In Colombia, the liberal and conservative parties agreed in 1958 to join in a consociational arrangement stipulated that for a period of sixteen years, the four-year presidency should alternate between the two parties, and that there should be equal representation (*paridad*) in all lower levels of government; non-military ministerial posts and for supreme court justices and civil servants. All the legislative assemblies in the country (Senate, Parliament, administrative and municipal councils) were divided

²⁶ According to the theory of cross-cutting cleavages, democracy and political stability basically depend on the degree of overlap between groups despite their different political, social, ethnic, linguistic, and religious affiliations, that is the overlap between groups despite the difference in their religious confession, in for example associations based on another dimension (socio-economic class). Therefore, interests linking these groups on the second level may undermine the sectarian allegiance on the first level. This fosters the building of other alliances outside the main cleavages, and thence, overlap between them can mitigate the political conflicts based on the primary affiliation. See: Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Modern Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1960); Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

²⁷ Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, pp. 14-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-12.

equally and solely between the conservative and liberal parties. In the Dutch parliamentary election of 1917, all the parties agreed not to contest some seats held by incumbents to safeguard the passage of a set of crucial constitutional amendments. This consociational solution has even been used in Great Britain, which is considered a highly homogeneous country, where a grand coalition government was formed during World War II.²⁹

Consensus in the cases mentioned above has not been restricted to identity-based groups but has also been applied by political parties between themselves before democracy becomes stable, or when none of them has been able to determine the conflict in their favor. This leads the other party to accept the majority rule, making a consociational transitional period necessary before the democratic settlement becomes customary. This was the solution reached by the leaders of *En-Nahda* and *An-Nida* in Tunisia to get through the transitional period when Tunisia was experiencing polarization and instability threatening the democratic transition. It was not, however, the solution chosen by the Egyptian party-political leaderships before the July 3, 2013 coup that ended the democratic transition. This affirms the importance of consensus among political elites and the presence of a political culture receptive of bargaining, settlements and accords.

In Lebanon, an accord was struck between the traditional leaderships of the confessional groups, by means of political parties or others, and in the shadow of the French mandate. Many researchers ascribe the crisis of the consociational system in Lebanon on the eve of the civil war to demographic change and a change in the population balance when the division of power between the religious confessions until the Taif Agreement remained essentially that of the 1943 National Pact. Demographic changes,³⁰ the emergence of other nationalist, leftist, and sectarian political forces opposed to the traditional leaderships of the confessional communities, and widespread opposition to Maronite political hegemony and Maronite monopoly of decision making led to that accord becoming unstable. The political forces fragmented over a number of issues, such as the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon in the face of Israeli pressure and were unable to reach an accord. The researcher Richard Dekmejian states that the Lebanese crisis in the 1970s, which led to the outbreak of the civil war, was in part rooted in the discrepancy in the relative representation between Muslims and

²⁹ Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," pp. 213-14.

³⁰ Examples of this are the interpretation of the crisis and civil war in Lebanon and the end of the consociational model. See Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "Consociational Democracy in Crisis: The Case of Lebanon," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 10, no. 2 (January 1978), pp. 251-65.

Christians in the upper elites as a result of the increase in the Muslim population since the 1932 census and constant Muslim objections to the Christian dominance over senior administrative posts. Shiite Muslims were also under-represented in the government posts in Lebanon, as shown in the table below.

Table 1 Confessional Representation, Parliament and Cabinet in Lebanon.

Sect	Parliamentary Representation		Cabinet Representation*		Cabinet Posts	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Maronites	30	30.3	886	25.9	105	25.5
Sunna	20	20.2	806	23.7	102	24.7
Shia	19	19.2	480	14.1	55	13.3
Orthodox	11	11.1	421	12.3	52	12.6
Catholic	6	6.1	376	11.0	46	11.1
Druze	6	6.1	408	11.9	48	11.6
Armenian Orthodox	4	4.0	32	0.9	4	0.96
Armenian Catholic	1	1.0	7	0.2	1	0.2
Protestant	1	1.0	--	--	--	--

Other minorities	1	1.0	--	--	--	--
*Cabinet Representation is determined by the total number of months that members of each sect occupied cabinet office.						

Source: Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "Consociational Democracy in Crisis: The Case of Lebanon," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 10, no. 2 (January 1978), p. 255.

After Al-Taif agreement, the demands of Muslims arising from the economic and cultural gap between the population groups, which is starker if measured according to the proportion of the different confessional groups, turned into Christian fears of a decrease in the Christian proportion and a reduction in the powers of the president and towards the arming of Shiite sectarian forces in parallel with the Shia population growth in Christian villages in the south after its liberation from Israeli occupation, as happened in Beirut where the same fears were shared with the leaders of the Sunni sect.³¹

Antoine Messarra disagrees with the idea that the causes of the 1975 war were internal but sees it as a war between outside powers. Nevertheless, he considers the failure in Lebanon to be real, with responsibility falling on the forces that wanted to change the system radically but instead rendered it more sectarian, backward, and immobile. This is another failure of traditional sectarian thinking which refuses any evolution in the principle of power sharing. Messarra rejects the idea of setting a nominal time period for abolishing the sectarian system³² as has been demanded by some secular, leftist, and non-Christian sectarian forces. He sees the idea of doing away with sectarianism in Lebanon as an ideological gamble that would most likely lead to increased sectarianism with the mobilization of the grassroots.³³

³¹ There is a detailed review of expression of these fears, the demographic gap, and the growth in Christian emigration since the Taif Accord in the chapter, "Sectarian Demography, Naturalization Laws, and the Concerns about Selling Land." See Abdel-Raouf Sinno, *Lebanon, Confessions in the Post-Confession State: Problems of Co-existence, Sovereignty, and External Roles* (Beirut: German Institute for Oriental Research, 2014), [Arabic], pp. 107-11.

³² Messarra, p. 131.

³³ Ibid. pp. 131-4.

Lijphart suggests that accord in a coalition government able to reach agreement and achieve stability requires the following conditions: (1) that the elites have the ability to accommodate the divergent interests and demands of the subcultures they represent. This requires (2) that they are able to transcend cleavages and join in a common effort with the elites of rival subcultures. This in turn depends on (3) their commitment to the maintenance of the system and its cohesion and stability. Finally, all these requirements assume (4) that the elites understand the perils of political fragmentation.³⁴ In fact, these four separate points are essentially a single issue regarding the realism and openness of the political elites. All these factors can be put down to the convictions of the political elite, inter-subcultural relations at the elite level, inter-subcultural relations at the mass level, and elite-mass relations within each of the subcultures³⁵.

On the first level, relations among elites of the subcultures, there are three factors that appear to be strongly conducive to the establishment and maintenance of cooperation among elites in a fragmented system. The first and most striking of these is the existence of external threats to the country. Alliances were formed between the elites in most consociational democracies during the two world wars. It must be noted here – in the context of the Arab Mashreq – that the leaderships of large transnational sects, which this chapter considers as “imagined sects”, usually answer to a foreign state that in itself poses a threat in terms of dominating the country. Hence, the external threat in such cases deepens the internal split rather than fostering the trend towards accord.

The second factor is a multiple balance of power among the subcultures instead of either a dual balance of power (two-party systems for example) or a clear hegemony by one subculture which obtains a majority and then dominates power rather than seeking to cooperate with rival minorities. Accordingly, accord is more likely in a multiparty or multi-group system, especially in societies where no one group dominates, and all its subcultures are made up of minorities, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Lebanon, and where it will be difficult for any one of them to obtain a majority in a classic democratic system.

The third factor is moderate pressure on the decision-making apparatus, since the aim of consociational democracy presupposes not only a willingness on the part of elites to cooperate but also a capability to solve the political problems of their countries. In

³⁴ Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy,” p. 216.

³⁵ Ibid.

fragmented societies there is always the risk of a state of political immobilism. Hence a little pressure can preclude that and increase the effectiveness of the regime.³⁶

In my view, these conditions do indeed produce a favorable environment. However, none of the aforementioned conditions might be of use in specific cases in which the leaderships of the political subcultures do not have the necessary will to bargain and reach accord linked to national and local allegiance.

On the second level, inter-subcultural relations at the mass level, distinct lines of cleavage among the subcultures are also conducive to consociational democracy. Lijphart explains this is the case because fragmented subcultures in a society can coexist provided they do not engage with each other. Each culture has its own interests and expectations. But where there is engagement and much overlap, this may result in conflict and instability.³⁷ The transformation of identity-based collectivities into self-contained communities whose boundaries are not penetrated by common institutions or other commonalities, is one of the factors for accord in this model. This is because the collectivity in whose name the leadership speaks is delimited and the points and interests over which accord is to be reached are clear from its perspective. I would however draw the reader's attention to the fact that this condition itself might not lead to accord and might perhaps become a favorable environment for the rise of demands for secession from the state and independence. Lijphart fails to see this.

On the third and last level, relations between the elite and its mass base for each subculture, Lijphart refers to the presence of boundaries between the subcultures that also lead to political unity within each subculture. Concomitant with a high degree of internal political cohesion of the subcultures is a unified position in support of the leaderships, which facilitates the accord process with the elites of other subcultures. Equally, the absence of overlap between the subcultures implies that pressure groups and political parties are restricted to representing each group on its own. The final factor conducive to consociational democracy on this level is the widespread approval of

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 217-18.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 219. Lijphart relies here on the writings of Quincy Wright, Sidney Verba, and David Easton, who suggest the creation of a policy of voluntary apartheid as the ideal solution to preclude tensions in fragmented societies. See: Quincy Wright, "The Nature of Conflict," *Western Political Quarterly*, vol. IV (June 1951), p. 196; Sidney Verba, "Some Dilemmas in Comparative Research," *World Politics*, vol. 20 (October 1967), p. 126; David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley, 1965), pp. 250-1.

the principle of government by elite cartel.³⁸ I do not agree with this proposition since the tendencies that contribute to group cohesion (such as political sectarianism) are the very ones that threaten the idea of a coalition of the different sects' elites. Political sectarianism, as I have explained, in many cases represents the process of mass popular participation in politics, and there are periods when political sectarianism forms a threat driving confrontation with the elites and ruling families of confessional communities made up of cartels. These soon afterwards settle into new sectarian elites whose roots may be from the ordinary people. In the midst of the crisis, the existing accommodation can fall apart.

After 1969 Lijphart started to use the term "power sharing" as a synonym for consociational democracy. He explains this as being because the term power sharing was easier to get across to decision makers and more readily understood than the concept of consociationalism, which was unfamiliar and difficult to say.³⁹ It should be stressed here that power sharing does not mean democracy in any case, and that restricting it to consociationalism affirms in fact the need to distinguish it from democracy. Consociational democracy is often used erroneously. This is one of main problems of Lijphart's limited theoretical effort which is mainly deduction from specific experiences.

Over the years, Lijphart worked to develop his theory and its conclusions by studying the cases of other states. He started with the Dutch experience in his 1968 book but in a 1969 article he referred to other examples: Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Switzerland, Lebanon, Nigeria, Colombia, and Uruguay. In 1977 he analyzed the democratic system of those countries in his book *Democracy in Plural Societies*,⁴⁰ and added other new examples including Malaysia, Cyprus, Suriname, the Dutch Antilles, Burundi, and Northern Ireland. He followed this with other case studies⁴¹ in which he went further than the formation of a coalition government as the key element for creating consociational democracy and included four elements: the formation of grand coalitions; minority mutual veto; the principle of proportionality in government appointments so as to represent all groups in society, contrary to the winner-take-all principle; and segmental autonomy and federalism.⁴²

³⁸ Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," pp. 221-2.

³⁹ Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.

⁴¹ Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy*, p. 5.

⁴² Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, pp. 25-44.

In 1996, Lijphart published an article on the democratic system in India,⁴³ which he stated was the paradigmatic example for the application of all the features of consociational democracy. For India, despite its marked ethnic, religious, and linguistic fragmentation, he succeeded in applying his model.⁴⁴ He puts forward the case of India as proof of the validity of his theory. India, as state and society, suffers from ethnic, religious, and denominational cleavages that from time to time explode into violent conflicts. Add to this the closed caste system within the Hindu majority. Starting with this model, in this article he sets out a more defined conception of consociational democracy, which he defines through four main and secondary factors: first, the formation of grand coalition governments that include representatives of all major linguistic and religious groups in society; second, cultural autonomy for these groups; third, proportionality in political representation and civil service appointments; and fourth, a minority veto. The two latter elements are of secondary important in the consociational democratic system, according to Lijphart.⁴⁵

The formation of a grand governing coalition in its narrow sense means the government's inclusion of the parties representing all the religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups in society, as is the case in Austria, Malaysia, and South Africa. Yet, the same principle can be applied at other levels of the state, as indicated above, such as the Dutch pattern of permanent or ad hoc "grand" councils or committees representing all the subcultures in the society, with much greater influence than their formal advisory role. Another entails guaranteed equal representation on a defined level for the groups in a fragmented society, on linguistic grounds for example, without necessarily forming a coalition government. This is the case with Belgian governments because of the constitutional rule that cabinets must consist of equal numbers of Flemish Dutch-speakers and Walloon French-speakers, even though such a cabinet does not represent all the main political parties. While in Lebanon, this principle was not applied on the formation of the government or the representation of the parties, however, they reached an accord to divide the parliamentary seats and the senior governmental positions on the basis of the sectarian divisions in the country.⁴⁶ Another sectarian quota option entails the allocation of public offices, including professional ones such as the judiciary and the universities, which infringes on profession considerations and

⁴³ Arend Lijphart, "The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational interpretation," *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 90, no. 2 (June 1996), pp. 258-68.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 258, 266.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 258.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 259.

competence, in a manner that goes further than consociationalism to deepen the social cleavages.

On the second element, cultural autonomy for subcultures, Lijphart states that this can take three forms: (1) federal arrangements in which geographic boundaries are congruent with linguistic or ethnic boundaries, as in Switzerland, Belgium and the former Czechoslovakia; (2) the right of cultural minorities, whether religious or linguistic, to establish and administer their own schools, autonomous in curriculum and administration, fully supported by public funds, as in Belgium and the Netherlands; and (3) separate personal status laws for religious minorities, as in Lebanon and Cyprus.⁴⁷ As is well known, the Muslim Turkish minority in Cyprus seceded and formed its own political entity.

In accordance with the principle of proportionality, the best electoral system in power-sharing democracies is proportional representation. It is not impossible however for power-sharing systems to allocate seats to minorities proportionately in the context of a majoritarian parliamentary system. Finally, the minority veto in power-sharing democracies usually consists of an informal understanding that minorities can effectively protect their autonomy. But in some cases the minority veto is formally entrenched in the constitution such as in Belgium, Cyprus and Czechoslovakia before its division.⁴⁸ These differences provide more proof that a fixed consociational democracy does not exist, but that it is rather a means (that may succeed or may fail) to prevent civil war. Secession may also be a means to limit the chances of civil war latent in inter-group conflict over power. Consociationalism aims to settle this without, however, providing democratic solutions.

In his 1969 article on consociational democracy Lijphart proposed a preliminary analysis of the conditions conducive to the creation and continuation of a consociational democratic system, as elaborated above, but by 1996 he had come up with a scheme of nine conditions conducive to consociational democracy:⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 260.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 261.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 262-3.

1. The absence of a solid majority in society. For if it exists, it prefers pure majority rule to consociationalism. This factor was mainly responsible for the 1963 failure of the Cypriot consociational system.
2. The absence of large socioeconomic differences among the groups of a divided society.
3. A small number of groups in the society. For if there are too many groups, then negotiations among them will be too difficult and complex.
4. The groups being of roughly the same size which helps promote a balance of power among them.
5. The total population being relatively small which makes the decision-making process less complex.
6. The presence of external threats which promotes internal unity.
7. The existence of overarching “national” loyalties which reduce the strength of particularistic loyalties.
8. If groups are geographically concentrated, then federalism can be used to promote group autonomy.
9. The adoption of compromise and accommodation fosters consociationalism.

Some of these factors are clearly new and some have changed radically as a result of an expanded set of country case studies. Although Lijphart came to focus on the first and second conditions as the most important of the nine, he reached the conclusion that consociational democracy will not necessarily come about even if all nine of the conditions are met and, equally, if none of them are met it is not impossible for consociational democracy to succeed. Ultimately, they are favorable or facilitating

conditions for consociational democracy. *The truth is that in the end we are left without a theory.*

We do not have a theory here, but the detailing of favorable conditions, which are neither necessary nor sufficient for achieving accord. What remains of the elements that compose any theory? Nothing. They are generalizations from specific cases, which are soon enough modified anew based on another specific case. They largely fail to predict the behavior of the elites or the masses. Factors such as political culture of elites will ultimately determine whether the “facilitating” conditions are really facilitating or not. Moreover, these factors are not the conditions for the establishment of a democratic system, but, as we indicated above, represent the conditions for a consociational system based on power-sharing to prevent society’s descent into civil war. This is not necessarily a democracy. The consociational system becomes democratic whenever it is centered on citizenship, while taking identity-based groups into account. Concentrating on those alone does not establish democracy and puts the accord permanently at risk of turning into civil conflicts or even secessionist movements.

Below, consociational democracy is applied to two very different case-studies, Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

Consociational Democracy and Solving the Northern Ireland Conflict

The last period of violence in Northern Ireland between Catholic Republicans and Protestant Unionists loyal to London began in 1968. This conflict – the Troubles – led to a sharp sectarian divide between the political forces in Northern Ireland and the involvement of the governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland in the conflict. On April 10, 1998 representatives of the conflicting parties, that is the Northern Irish political parties and the governments of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic,

concluded the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement of 1998, known as the Good Friday Agreement or the Belfast Accords.

Political elites representing groups in a fragmented society reaching an agreement in a democratic framework representing all parties – following the acknowledgement that the conflict could not be settled militarily – might be considered at the heart of “consociational democracy”. And most scholars in this field agree with that view.⁵⁰ According to Lijphart, the key pillar of consociational democracy is cooperation between the political elites over the mechanisms of consociational democracy in a manner that ensures a degree of political stability and saves the country from civil war.⁵¹

In the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, representatives of the political elite from all parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland and the governments of Britain and the Irish Republic declared their support for the agreement. They affirmed their opposition to violence, and their commitment to cooperation and the use of non-violent and democratic means to resolve differences over political issues, through mutual trust and respect for the rights of others.⁵² Based on the analysis of the elements of consociational democracy, as delineated above by Lijphart, the solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland contained all those elements: (1) the formation of a grand coalition government comprising representatives of all the parties to the social and political divide; (2) a system of cultural autonomy for the affairs of these groups;⁵³ (3) endorsement of the principle of proportionate representation for government and civil-service posts; and (4) the right to a minority veto, even though the latter two elements are not always necessary to create consociational democracy.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Robert Taylor, a specialist in democratic transition in South Africa and Northern Ireland known for his critical stance towards the adoption of “consociational democracy” as a mechanism to resolve conflicts, indicates that “only a small number of researchers have seriously doubted that the current settlement in Northern Ireland is a consociational settlement, since consociationalism played an effective and positive role in formulating the Belfast Agreement.” See: Rupert Taylor (ed.), *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O’Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy,” pp. 211-12; Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, pp. 14-16.

⁵² “The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement,” UN Peacemaker, p. 2, accessed on December 2, 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/J9JYPn>

⁵³ This is reminiscent of the contributions of the Austrian Marxists as represented by the ideas of Bauer and Renner.

⁵⁴ Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy,” p. 216; Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, pp. 25-44; Lijphart, “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy,” p. 258.

Accord was reached to form a coalition government in Northern Ireland that represented all sides. The “executive branch” was formed by the legislative branch electing the first minister and deputy first minister with the agreement of a majority of both Nationalists and Unionists using the system of cross-community vote. Following this, the posts of ministers are allocated according to the principle of the proportional representation of the parties based on the d’Hondt system,⁵⁵ and with reference to the number of seats each party has in the Assembly.⁵⁶ In this way, the two sides guarantee their representation in government in proportion to their strength.

The model of Lijphart contained a reference to the formation of coalitions that could also be applied to other levels in the state, such as specialist councils or committees with powers that might go beyond the usual consultative role.⁵⁷ In this context, it was agreed to form parliamentary committees with responsibility for monitoring the main executive tasks of the government in Northern Ireland. The committees develop policy and propose legislation, as well as having a consultative role for ministries and government agencies. Committee chairs and their deputies are appointed by proportional representation based on the D’Hondt system. Membership of committees is also based on proportional representation according to the strength of the parties in parliament.⁵⁸

The peace agreement adopted the principle of autonomy for the inhabitants of Northern Ireland since it stipulated that the governments of Britain and the Irish Republic recognize the right of the people of Northern Ireland to freely decide their future and the political status of Northern Ireland by choosing whether it should remain under UK sovereignty or be incorporated into the Irish Republic. In this way, British sovereignty became legally defined, not imposed. The agreement also provided support for all the people of Northern Ireland to choose Irish or British citizenship, or both, which would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.⁵⁹ With regard to the economic, social, and cultural issues of the conflicting parties, it was agreed to take measures necessary to foster the Irish language in state institutions, schools, television, and other spheres. It was also agreed to follow sustainable-development economic policies that foster stability and social inclusion in Northern Ireland in urban, rural, and

⁵⁵ This proportional system for distributing seats was named in the United States after Thomas Jefferson and in Europe after the Belgian jurist and professor of mathematics, Victor D’Hondt (1841-1901).

⁵⁶ “The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement,” (15), (16), pp. 8-9.

⁵⁷ Lijphart, “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy,” p. 259.

⁵⁸ “The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement,” (8), (9), pp. 8-9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* (1), p. 3.

border areas, adopt the principle of equality in employment, take steps to combat unemployment, and progressively eliminate the disparity in unemployment rates between the Protestant and Catholic communities, strengthen anti-discrimination laws, and recognize the importance of respect, understanding, and tolerance with regard to linguistic diversity in Ireland.⁶⁰ This was adopted on the basis of citizenship and the expansion of rights to include social rights.

The agreement provided for the creation of democratic institutions in Northern Ireland proportionally representative of the divided communities. It provided for the election of a parliament, the Assembly, with 108 seats to represent all sections of society by means of the single transferable vote, a form of proportional representation.⁶¹ While the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Assembly “are elected by the agreement of a majority of both Nationalists and Unionists on a cross-community basis”.⁶²

Ensuring the right of veto based on the right of minorities to protect their autonomy, the agreement provided for the need to take the necessary measures to ensure that key decisions were made with the agreement of both sides, Nationalist and Unionists. This is either by means of parallel consent, i.e. a majority of the Unionists and Nationalists present and voting, or a weighted majority of 60 percent of members present and voting, including at least 40 percent of each of the Nationalists and Unionists.⁶³

In view of the above, the agreement reached by the conflicting parties to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict can certainly be classified a consociational democratic solution, based on democracy and the constitutional recognition of the presence of different communities (Catholics and Protestants in this instance), and of the need for them to share decision making and not allow the demographic majority to monopolize power.⁶⁴

Lijphart details the historical conditions that led to the choice of consociational democracy as follows:

1. The absence of a solid majority in society, a condition applicable to the case of Northern Ireland, since the proportion of the two parties to the conflict were

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 20-1.

⁶¹ Ibid. (1), p. 7.

⁶² Ibid. (7), p. 8.

⁶³ Ibid. (5), p. 7.

⁶⁴ Lijphart, “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy,” pp. 262-3.

somewhat similar. According to official statistics from 1991, Catholics made up 38.4 percent of the population and Protestants 42.8 percent.⁶⁵ Those figures represent an increase in the number of those who do not identify themselves in sectarian terms and in the proportion of Catholics. In the past, the proportion of Catholics to Protestants was about one-third to two-thirds, a factor which reduced the desire of the Protestant majority to reach an agreement.

2. The absence of large socioeconomic differences among the groups of a divided society. It can be said that this condition is not found in the case of Northern Ireland. For example, in 1991, 50.44 percent of all unemployed were Catholics, compared with 30.18 percent of Protestants.⁶⁶
3. A small number of the divided groups in the society: Northern Ireland is only divided between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Republicans.
4. The groups being of roughly the same size: the two conflicting communities were of roughly the same size in 1991, as stated in (1) above.
5. The total population being relatively small: according to population statistics for Northern Ireland, the 1991 population was around 1.5 million.⁶⁷
6. The presence of external threats which promotes internal unity. Such a condition did not apply in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, the British and Irish governments helped forge the agreement.
7. The existence of overarching “national” loyalties which reduce the strength of particularistic loyalties. This condition was not present in the case of Northern Ireland.

⁶⁵ Department of Health and Social Services, *The Northern Ireland Census 1991: Religion Report* (Belfast: NISRA, 1993), p. 2, accessed on February 16, 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/2eLD3BI>

⁶⁶ Department of Health and Social Services, *The Northern Ireland Census 1991: Summary Report* (Belfast: NISRA, 1992), Table 18: Population economically active aged 16-64 by occupation, religion and sex, p. 147, accessed on February 16, 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/2eLITnL>

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

8. If groups are geographically concentrated, then federalism can be used to promote group autonomy. It can be argued that this condition was present in Northern Ireland, since most Protestants live in the eastern and northern areas, as was explained, while in the areas closest to the south there was a Catholic majority. Nevertheless, the presence of this condition did not drive the parties participating in the agreement to adopt a system of regional federalism.⁶⁸ It was agreed that personal autonomy applied based on an individual's affiliation to the community.
9. The adoption of compromise and accommodation fosters consociationalism: this condition was fulfilled by the parties to the conflict adopting a peaceful course from the beginning of the 1990s and declaring a ceasefire, and although this faltered at a number of periods, the final agreement was reached in 1998.

As previously explained not all these conditions need to be present to reach an accord; they are neither necessary nor sufficient. What matters is (1) the conviction of the political forces representing the sides forming identity-based groups of the impossibility of achieving any of the following: military victory, separation, rule by the demographic majority; (2) the mental and cultural willingness of these forces to come to agreement through a democratic system whereby each party may not achieve all its demands, no party fails to achieve some of them; (3) along with their willingness to understand the positions and demands of the other parties and respect for their concessions.

These are subjective conditions that must be met by the political elites, and it is possible to disagree over an assessment of the historical conditions that led to these convictions and their relative significance. However, the cornerstone for the success of the Northern Ireland experience was accord in the framework of a democratic system, since it was not possible for the conflicting parties, or for the powers sponsoring the agreement (Great Britain and the Irish Republic) and the international backers (the United States and the European Union) to reach agreement over power sharing outside the framework of democracy (as is the case in accord between the political dynasties ruling the confessions in Lebanon for example). In the case of Northern Ireland, the surrounding political environment in play for reaching an agreement was a democratic one which favored the achievement of an agreement within a democratic context.

Britain and Ireland are however not Saudi Arabia and Syria, the two states that were invited to intervene to impose agreement during the crises in Lebanon between the Taif

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

Accords in 2011. Lijphart thus details what he gathers from specific experiences but without making much theoretical effort. The experiences of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen for instance could add conditions derived from different historical circumstances. In Iraq, for example, the political elites did not reach an accord, rather sectarian power-sharing was imposed by the US occupation on the basis of an assumed sectarian divide, against assumed sectarian minority rule, which mobilized rejection to it, even though it was not constitutionally entrenched. The sectarian divide imposed by the occupation forces became one of the major sources of sectarianism.

Lijphart himself, in an article from 1975,⁶⁹ did not think consociational democracy was likely to be brought about in Ireland, because the elites on both sides were unwilling to accept such a solution. As a result, he proposed partition.⁷⁰

It must be added that the conflict in Northern Ireland did not split a state, rather it divided a society (in a region within a state) which differs from the cases put forward by Lijphart in his various studies. The Northern Ireland conflict involved the divided political parties within the provinces of Northern Ireland as well as the governments of Britain and Ireland. For this reason, the agreement has three parts. The first concerns power sharing on a consociational democratic basis in Northern Ireland (which we elaborate on above). The second part is the formation of a ministerial council between the North and South of Ireland to organize relations between them in a resolution in favor of the Republicans. Thirdly is the organization of Anglo-Irish relations, a resolution in favor of the Unionists.

⁶⁹ Arend Lijphart, "The Northern Ireland Problem; Cases, Theories, and Solutions," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1975), pp. 83-106.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5. As usual, well-known scholars in Western universities, such as Lijphart, put forward ideas like this in social science and humanities journals or in the form of reports from regional or international organizations, as has been the case for the past two decades. These articles and reports are published in academic journals, even though they actually express their points of view, are adjudicated based on the information available to them, the conclusions their analytical abilities enable them to draw, and how emotionally and morally close to or far from the issue raised they are. The danger lies in the fact that such articles are presented as if they embody knowledge itself. Rather than approaching them as hypotheses to be subjected to criticism and deconstruction, they are dealt with as "sacred" texts because of their "aura of knowledge" (surely an oxymoron) since they have been published in a journal. In fact, they very often become a reference from which to derive solutions and plans for implementation. The publication of contradictory articles on consociational solutions confirms the relevance of our concerns about the "sacredness" of these journals, which are objects of "worship" in western academia. We are not here criticizing academic publication in itself, which is necessary for many reasons, but the dealing with academic journals as though they embody pure knowledge by neglecting the institutional parties that have their own political and ideological line of bias like any establishment.

With regard to the organization of relations between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in the south, the provisions of the second part of the agreement stipulate the formation of a ministerial council dealing with the affairs of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic for consultation and cooperation between the two executives and the resolution of joint north-south issues. Cooperation is covered in the fields of education, exchange of expertise, social security, urban and rural development, emergency services, agriculture, the environment, waterways, inland fisheries, aquaculture and marine matters, transport, tourism, and EU Programs relevant to all Ireland.⁷¹

The third part of the agreement comprises provisions organizing relations between Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments. In this context it was agreed to establish a British-Irish Council composed of representatives of the British and Irish Governments and the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, England and the Channel Islands. The council, according to the agreement, "is for the exchange of information, discussion, and consultation on matters of mutual interest to reach agreement between all the members on means of co-operation and mechanisms to implement them".⁷²

I repeat that accord in Northern Ireland was reached in the framework of the acceptance of a democratic system based on citizenship, and not just on the basis of the Northern Irish historical experience itself and its political system, but because the nation states participating in the forging of the agreement to which the people of Northern Ireland belong, either through confession or citizenship – the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic – are democratic states.

Consociationalism in Lebanon

From the theoretical perspective illustrated above,⁷³ it is possible to classify the political system in Lebanon from independence in 1943 to the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in the mid-1970s as a consociational system. The 15 confessions recognized and organized by law are described as "tantamount to the true corporate persons in the

⁷¹ "The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement," pp. 13-15.

⁷² *Ibid.* pp. 16-17.

⁷³ Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, pp. 147-50.

view of public law, and together form the infrastructure of the Lebanese state."⁷⁴ There is a prevailing belief that there was a post-independence agreement to form a semi-presidential system in the context of a broad coalition of most of the confessions in Lebanon. Based on this unofficial and unwritten agreement, which is termed the 1943 National Pact, the president must be Maronite, the prime minister Sunni, the speaker of parliament Shiite (this is not true and was not part of the pact as we shall see),⁷⁵ and the deputy speaker and deputy prime minister Greek Orthodox. This agreement was designed based on the numerical strength of the confessions at that time. In the mid-1950s, Lebanese society consisted of 30 percent Maronites, 20 percent Sunni Muslims, 18 percent Shiite Muslims, and 11 percent Greek Orthodox, as well as other smaller Muslim and Christian confessions.

The mechanisms used to elect the president and members of parliament were not based on proportional representation. The president was elected by a majority vote in parliament. Since it was settled that the president had to be Maronite, this mechanism (majority vote) does not allow representatives of other confessions to compete for the post, but they do participate in the choice, and their votes might be decisive. Parliamentary elections are usually held using constituencies. In each constituency, lists of candidates are put forward, and each list represents the sectarian makeup of the constituency. The number of constituencies has varied, but the proportion of Christian to Muslim MPs has generally been 6 to 5. Lijphart defines this system as being "proportional representation designed in advance on a sectarian basis". The principle of proportional representation was also applied to civil-service appointments.

The element of segmental autonomy for the different subcultures in a fragmented society is one of the components of the system in Lebanon. Each confession has its own schools and social and charitable institutions. Civil status laws in Lebanon also differ from one confession to another, and each confession manages personal status in its own courts. It is not possible for two litigants to agree not to litigate before the confession's court and have recourse to a civil court. Sectarianism is obligatory. Suleiman Taqi al-Din described the Lebanese political system after the constitution laid

⁷⁴ Edmond Rabbat, *The Historical Creation of the Political and Constitutional Lebanon* (Beirut: Publications of the Lebanese University, 2002), p. 215. [Arabic]

⁷⁵ The Pact is akin to an agreement between Riyadh al-Sulh and Bishara al-Khoury in 1943, which is mentioned in a number of speeches and situations. It aimed to make Lebanon independent from the Arab states and France on the basis that this independence was final and not transitional towards unity with Syria or any other country, so that Lebanon maintained its character. Edmond Rabbat thought that the Pact was based on the "Lebanonization" of the Muslims and the Arabization of the Christians. *Ibid.* pp. 830-41.

down in the mandate period very well when he said, "Accordingly, confessionalism is not a husk over the national structure limited to political representation, but it is a comprehensive system consolidating underlying social relations as well, in that it organizes a hierarchy of links from top to bottom that citizens confront in their daily lives."⁷⁶ I disagree however with terming political representation a husk. It has an effect on society and is the most important instrument in cementing the overarching sectarian system.

The right to mutual veto was also a key condition in the Lebanese political system, even though it was an unwritten right. According to Lijphart, consociational democracy remained effective in Lebanon for 30 years until the civil war but was found to be weak because of "inflexible institutionalization of the principles of consociational democracy." This ultimately led to political immobilism. Lijphart and other Western analysts sympathetic to the Lebanese model do not see that there is another perspective, one which sees rule by Maronite dynasties and families with privileges compared to the dynasties and bourgeoisie of other confessions. In this sense the system is a closed accord, meaning closed in terms of the political concessions to the ruling dynasties of a particular confession.

Fawaz Traboulsi wrote that on the eve of the civil war there was "a contradiction between the political system and the economic and social realities of the country,"⁷⁷ such as the swelling of the middle class, the emergence of social and student movements, and the contradiction between a liberal economy and monopolies. "Real political dynasties dominated parliament."⁷⁸ In my opinion, all these factors coalesced to create a ripe environment conducive to an explosion. However, the system's main problem, in my view, lies in a political sectarianism that lacks commitment to the sovereignty of the state.

Lijphart's model is problematic because it does not distinguish sufficiently between consociationalism and consociational democracy. For example, the leaderships of the Lebanese confessions came to accord several times after the civil war, or after conflicts, in a way that protected some freedoms, and semi-democratic institutions operated as a result of respect for the constitution, as long as the balance between the confessions

⁷⁶ Suleiman Taqi al-Din, *The Historical Evolution of the Lebanese Problem 1920–1970 (Precursors to the Civil War)*, (Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1977), p. 38. [Arabic]

⁷⁷ Fawaz Traboulsi, *The Modern History of Lebanon: From the Emirate to the Taif Agreement*, revised edition (Beirut: Dar Al-Rayyis, 2008), p. 303. [Arabic]

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 279-303.

existed. This accord was not, however, democratic. "This political system initially reflects an objective reality based on the superiority, dominance, and precedence of the Christian bourgeoisie in general and the Maronite bourgeoisie. The function of this system was not just to reflect this balance but to prevent its disruption. ... It was constructed ... to enable a confessional minority economically and politically linked with the West to continue to represent the upper hand in political decisions and options."⁷⁹ Consociational democracy is thus not based on the foundation of equal citizenship, and is not bolstered by a democratic culture. Rather accord is managed by "ruling families" within each confession, with concessions for the confessional elites. Recently, some confessional dynasties have been replaced by confessional parties who do not believe in or adhere to the values of democracy. A relationship between the leaders of confessional parties and regional states had been instituted, often making the accord subject to international and regional balances of power. Sectarian weapons also exist, making deterrence an alternative to accord. This has made co-existence akin to a cold war, which could turn into a civil war at any time. As previously mentioned, others have seen the cause for this being the demographic changes that have upset the existing balance.

In cases of accord generally, it is assumed that the subjective ability to maintain harmony is more important than agreements and pacts. But this ability to maintain harmony has not been clear since Lebanese independence, because it is difficult to gauge this subjective ability in the shadow of outside factors that foster harmony and help preserve or undermine it. Particularistic affiliations and loyalties to families within the confession are a stronger factor than ideology in unifying a political party, and stronger even than loyalty to state institutions.

Finally, with the existence of a sectarian political system and a sectarian political culture, it is easy for any social, political, or class conflict to be transformed to take on a sectarian guise. All these factors together have not just rendered the Lebanese confessional system liable to explode from time to time, but also capable of reformulating the accord after each explosion in a way that further deepens sectarianism every time.

⁷⁹ Taqi al-Din, p. 144.

For this reason, change in Lebanon has usually come about through major crises involving violence followed by a new consociational formulation, usually with foreign involvement. The most violent of such crises was the 1975 civil war. After the war, the Taif Agreement imposed constitution amendments, most of which tended to reduce Maronite political privileges. These included changing the 6-to-5 division of parliamentary seats in favor of Christians overall to a new, equal division of parliamentary seats between Christian and Muslim representatives, encompassing all of the confessional diversity between these two groups. Similarly, the most important amendment introduced by the 1990 constitution was the institutionalization of an effective and genuine Council of Ministers. Instead of a loose council of government ministers convened by the President of the Republic, the Lebanese cabinet became a separate institution the head of which effectively became the Prime Minister. The Taif Agreement fundamentally changed Articles 17 and 53 of the constitution concerning the exercise of executive authority, since it shifted most of the president's powers to the cabinet.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 78. Before the Taif Agreement there were Syrian–Lebanese talks coordinated by the US Ambassador April Gillespie over three rounds in 1987 in an attempt to make the three presidencies equal. See Messarra, p. 91.

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