Power-Sharing as a Tool of Conflict Management:

The Experience of Northern Ireland and South Tyrol

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In deeply divided societies, power-sharing is often promoted as a tool of conflict management to manage ethnonational tensions. These societies, which tend to be characterised by ethnic, linguistic and/or religious divisions, are often marked by periods of intrastate conflict and political instability, necessitating more imaginative thinking *vis-à-vis* the management of diversity and political institutions to enhance democratic stability. Drawing on the cases of Northern Ireland and South Tyrol – two examples of regional consociations in complex power-sharing systems – this chapter examines the experience of power-sharing as a tool of conflict management. The analysis highlights the efficacy of (regional) consociationalism as a diversity accommodation tool and argues that while power-sharing is not a panacea, it can prove a powerful and transformative tool for conflict management in divided places.

1. Introduction

Writing in the mid-19th century, John Stuart Mill ([1861] 1946: 294) asserted 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities'. In recent decades, Mill's pessimism *vis-à-vis* the compatibility of democracy and plurinationalism has been challenged through both normative and empirical analysis and further negated by the existence of countries such as Canada and India. What is more, 'Mill's dictum has been taken up as a challenge by scholars and practitioners of institutional design in divided societies to find ways in which democracy and diversity can be married in stable and democratic ways' (Wolff and Cordell, 2016: 289). Power-sharing in its various guises is one such institutional design increasingly mooted as an innovative response to facilitating minority protection, democratic stability, and peaceful coexistence in deeply divided societies.

In recent decades, we have witnessed an increasing number of intrastate conflicts around the World, rooted in and fuelled by ethnonational and political hostilities. These conflicts, which often involve societies divided along ethnic, linguistic or religious lines, are among the most intractable conflicts to resolve. It is in this context that power-sharing mechanisms are oft-promoted as institutional resolutions to lead fragmented societies away from violence and toward stable democracy. Power-sharing is best construed as an umbrella term encompassing various forms of territorial accommodation. Important to note, however, is that while different power-sharing strategies are empirically distinct and vary in their institutional prescriptions (Anderson 2013), they share a similar aim: 'to craft institutions which facilitate the (re)building of trust between groups and in the institutions by which they govern themselves and which consolidate democracy and stability within a divided society' (Yakinthou and Wolff, 2012: 6). Indeed, despite conventional wisdom that often pits one power-sharing theory against another, it is not uncommon to find a combination of mechanisms from various power-sharing theories at work in divided societies (Bogaards 2019).

Drawing on the cases of Northern Ireland and South Tyrol – two examples of regional consociations in complex power-sharing systems – this chapter examines the experience of power-sharing as a tool of conflict management. The first section addresses some

terminological clarifications, identifying the principal components of the two main power-sharing strategies – consociationalism and centripetalism – as well as examining overlap between power-sharing strategies and the theory and practice of federalism and federation. The second section introduces the Northern Irish and South Tyrolean cases and discusses their institutional configurations. Still focused on the cases, the third section assesses the evolution of power-sharing dynamics in both systems and highlights some of the ongoing challenges to the power-sharing regimes. The final section concludes by looking at the challenges and opportunities of power-sharing as a conflict management strategy. I highlight the efficacy of (regional) consociationalism as a diversity accommodation tool and argue that while power-sharing is not a panacea, it can prove a powerful and transformative tool for conflict management in divided places.

2. Power-Sharing: An Umbrella Term

Power-sharing denotes 'an inherently accommodative set of attitudes, processes, and institutions, in which the art of governance becomes a matter of bargaining, conciliating, and compromising the aspirations and grievances of its ethnic communities' (Esman, 2004: 198). The definition above provides a broad understanding of power-sharing which includes various institutional strategies, such as consociationalism, centripetalism, and federalism. Federalism, particularly when used as a tool of conflict management in ethnically diverse states, can be understood as a power-sharing strategy (McGarry and O'Leary 2005) while both consociationalism and centripetalism involve direct power-sharing in the shape of pre- and post-election coalitions (McCulloch, 2014a: 5).

Consociationalism is a power-sharing strategy that ensures the representation and participation of all major societal groups in government. It is most closely associated with the work of Arend Lijphart (1968; 1969; 1977) and, later, of John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (McGarry and O'Leary (1993; 2004; 2016). To date, consociationalism remains the most widely applied power-sharing model found in numerous places, *inter alia*, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, South Tyrol and Switzerland (Keil and McCulloch 2021). The academic literature distinguishes between two different forms of consociationalism: liberal and corporate. Corporate consociationalism 'accommodates groups according to ascriptive criteria, such as ethnicity or religion' while the liberal distinction 'rewards whatever salient political identities emerge in democratic elections, whether these are based on ethnic or religious groups, or on subgroup or transgroup identities' (McGarry and O'Leary, 2007: 675). In other words, corporate consociationalism is premised on the logic of pre-determination, while liberal consociationalism emphasises self-determination. Among the most prominent advocates of consociationalism, the liberal variety is considered the most optimal conflict management response (Lijphart 2008; McGarry and O'Leary 2007), offering 'more flexibility and enabl[ing] the longer-term change towards politics that are not entirely driven by narrow group interests' (Wolff, 2011: 1797-1798). Nonetheless, given the strong preponderance of group identities during settlement negotiations, corporate consociationalism tends to feature prominently in negotiated settlements (McCulloch 2014b).

Consociationalism is undergirded by two principal characteristics: grand coalition and segmental autonomy, and two secondary attributes: proportionality and minority veto. Elite cooperation in the form of grand coalition is a principal requisite of a consociational regime in order to facilitate a more collaborative and consensual approach to politics. In line with forced power-sharing at the centre, 'segmental autonomy' which may be both territorial and non-territorial, is also implemented. Proportionality ensures that groups present in the executive are

adequately represented not only in government and parliament, but also in other key public services and institutions, such as the civil service, judiciary, military and police. In addition, consociationalists advocate the application of the proportionality principle to public resources and budgetary expenditure, as well as the institutionalisation of a proportional electoral system. Proportionality is a crucial element in a consociational system, guaranteeing the main groups access to political power and decision-making processes and providing structural safeguards against majority group domination (Walsh, 2016: 288). Finally, consociationalism affords elites a mutual veto. The veto is considered a necessary tool to temper majoritarianism and thus enable minorities to protect their vital interests.

While the focus of consociationalism is on an elite driven approach which entails group representation and power-sharing, centripetalism differs in that its emphasis is on depoliticising ethnicity and creating institutions to facilitate electoral incentives for cross-and multi-ethnic parties. Mostly associated with Donald Horowitz (1985; 1993) and Benjamin Reilly (2001; 2006), centripetalists support reducing the salience of ethnonational differences through incentivising politicians to endorse broader, inclusive, and more moderate policy platforms. This is achieved through the organisation of political parties along multi-ethnic lines as opposed to solely ethnic lines as well as the formation of pre-election, multi-ethnic coalitions. What is more, the use of a majoritarian-preferential electoral system necessitates vote polling, thus incentivising 'political leaders [to] seek support outside their own group to win elections' (Bogaards, 2019: 520). While centripetal elements can be identified in numerous cases (Fiji, Nigeria and Sri Lanka), and its underlying assumptions are theoretically compelling, there is limited empirical evidence to support its claims. Consequently, McCulloch (2021: 342) argues that 'centripetalism may be more appropriate as a preventive measure to avoid ethnic conflict than as a response to it'.

Federalism, with its commitment to disperse and distribute political power among constituent units of a state and facilitating shared rule among these orders of government, represents another form of power-sharing. Combining the pre-requisite structures of self-rule and shared rule, federalism serves as an accommodative territorial measure in which the aspirations of both minority and majority groups can be managed and fulfilled. For minorities, federalism provides autonomous control over important policy ambits (self-rule) while extending their influence on state decision-making apparatus through representation in second chambers or intergovernmental relations (shared rule). Beyond minority protection, the implementation of federal structures can also address (majority) concerns regarding the prospect of state disintegration. As has been argued elsewhere, 'federalism may not necessarily eliminate secessionist claims, but a proper functioning federal system ought to render the pursuit of independent statehood obsolete, thus maintaining the stability and territorial integrity of the state' (Anderson and Keil, 2021: 239). In a similar vein to other power-sharing theories in which there is general agreement that arrangements should be context-specific, there is no single formula for the establishment of a federal state. Federations vary in terms of both political and constitutional symmetry, but the special appeal of federalism remains rooted in 'the dual goal of unity and diversity' (Burgess, 1993: 3). As recent scholarship attests, federalism can be a powerful tool in conflict management and resolution, equipped to accommodate and recognise ethnic, national, regional and territorial distinctiveness in plurinational states (Gagnon and Tremblay 2020; Keil and Alber 2020).

Notwithstanding the terminological distinctions above, there is conceptual overlap among power-sharing theories. In 1985, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* published a special issue in which Arend Lijphart and Daniel Elazar (among others) examined the relationship between federalism and consociationalism. In agreement that consociationalism as well as federalism

represent accommodative territorial strategies, Lijphart (1985: 3;4) argued that while both are 'conceptually and empirically' distinct, federalism and consociationalism 'entail a rejection of majoritarian democracy'. For Elazar (1985: 19; 33), 'federalism and consociationalism are directed to the achievement and maintenance of both unity and diversity' but they differ in the sense that 'federalism relates to the form of the polity and consociationalism relates to the character of the regime'. Moreover, Elazar (ibid: 19) considered federalism 'rigid' in comparison to the potential informality of consociational arrangements which he argued were more flexible. As well as initiating an ongoing debate on the federal-consociational relationship, what the scholarly exchange in *Publius* also highlights is the overlapping nature of power-sharing regimes. In the last few decades, scholars have begun to pay more attention to the limitations of individual power-sharing approaches, recognising that combining mechanisms from different power-sharing approaches may prove more effective in regulating and resolving ethnic conflict (Weller and Metzger 2008; Wolff 2009).

Complex power-sharing, as its nomenclature infers, 'describes a practice of conflict settlement that requires a relatively complex institutional structure across different layers of authority from the center down to local government units' (Wolff, 2010: 548). Central to this territorial strategy is the use of autonomy as a device to facilitate internal self-determination, albeit the wider territorial model 'includes a range of further mechanisms for the accommodation of ethnic diversity in divided societies' (Wolff, 2009: 29). Complex power-sharing also recognises the prominent role played by international actors which have become increasingly involved in the promotion of power-sharing as a conflict management tool (McEvoy 2014). Notwithstanding the dominance of individual power-sharing theories, modern practice has moved beyond theoretical divisions to combine different conflict management mechanisms from various power-sharing traditions. The relevance of complex power-sharing for our discussion here lies not just in its conceptual importance, but as is highlighted in the next section, both Northern Ireland and South Tyrol are examples of complex power-sharing arrangements.

Power-Sharing in Practice: Northern Ireland and South Tyrol

Northern Ireland and South Tyrol are examples of regional consociations, that is, 'consociational arrangements …[that]… extend only to the disputed territory and the ethnic groups living there, rather than being the organising principle for the state's institutional structures as a whole' (Wolff, 2005: 103). In both cases, power-sharing is used as a conflict management tool, which has been in place in South Tyrol for fifty years (established in 1972) and in Northern Ireland for over two decades (established in 1998). There is a set of features that are common to both cases. Both Northern Ireland and South Tyrol are located in Western Europe and are territories with rather small populations (Northern Ireland 1.9 million and South Tyrol 533,000). In addition, both territories share borders with kin states (Ireland and Austria), which have also played crucial roles in the promotion of power-sharing in both territories. With regards to power-sharing arrangements, there are further similarities: both systems align with the consociational model, power-sharing arrangements were negotiated rather than imposed and finally, both power-sharing settlements were embedded within international treaties (The Good Friday Agreement (1998) in Northern Ireland and the Paris Peace Treaty (1946) in South Tyrol). Interestingly, however, while cooperative power-sharing has been implemented in both cases to manage ethnonational divisions, South Tyrol is best defined as a corporate consociation (Carlà 2018) while Northern Ireland is more aligned with the liberal model (Nagle 2016). McCulloch (2014b), however, classifies Northern Ireland as a hybrid model, combining both corporate and liberal elements.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland came into being following the partition of the island of Ireland in the early 1920s. The result of decades of turmoil between nationalists (in favour of Irish independence) and unionists (in favour of remaining in the United Kingdom (UK)), Ireland became an independent state (the Irish Free State and latterly the Republic of Ireland) while six counties in the north formed a new political entity, Northern Ireland. The demographic consequence of partition was to create a Protestant/unionist majority, protected from inclusion in the predominantly Irish Catholic state, and a Catholic/nationalist minority that despite largely supporting Irish unity, remained part of the UK (McGarry and O'Leary 2004). The fundamentally distinct political visions that characterised conflict in Ireland preceding partition, therefore, remained a source of tension in the north, exacerbated by discriminatory practices against the minority Catholic population, such as the gerrymandering of local council boundaries to create unionist administrations and a Protestant-privileged public housing policy. From the 1960s onward, tensions between unionists and nationalists were marked by an intensification of violence involving paramilitary organisations and state security forces. Numerous attempts were made to bring an end to the violence, including the ill-fated Sunningdale Agreement to introduce power-sharing in the early 1970s, but it was not until 1998 and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) that a consociational power-sharing system was fully implemented in Northern Ireland.

The GFA differed from previous attempts at peace resolution given it involved multiparty negotiations with political parties considered both moderate and extreme (Coakley and Todd 2020). Supported by the British and Irish governments, and shepherded by the Bill Clinton administration in the USA, the Agreement was divided into three strands. Strand One focused on internal institutions, providing for a consociational power-sharing regime. Strands Two and Three created institutions to facilitate relations between the different governments, including the North-South Ministerial Council to establish cross-border relations between the Irish and Northern Irish governments and the British-Irish Council and British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference to reflect East-West relations. The GFA represented a compromise for both sides; nationalists secured recognition of their right to self-determination, that is to re-join the Republic, but only in the event of an affirmative result in a referendum on the issue, which consequently assuaged unionist concerns about a united Ireland (McGarry, 2019: 550). The creation of these institutions as well as the involvement of international actors underlines Wolff's (2009) thesis that Northern Ireland represents a lucid example of 'complex power-sharing'.

Northern Ireland's executive takes the form of a grand coalition. The executive is led by a First and Deputy First Minister, both of whom are nominated by the largest parties in the legislature representing the different communities. In short, the First and Deputy First Minister must represent not only different political parties, but different community designations (i.e., nationalist, unionist or others). Despite the nomenclature of deputy, the First and Deputy First Minister are co-equal heads of the executive. In line with consociationalism's proportionality principle, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are elected via the Single Transferable Vote, a proportional electoral system requiring voters to rank candidates in order of preference. Based on the d'Hondt algorithm, which allocates seats in the executive based on the numerical strength of the parties in the legislature, the make-up of the executive is also proportional as too is membership of legislative committees (Walsh, 2016: 290). MLAs are required to designate themselves as 'nationalists', 'unionists' or 'others'. This designation plays an important role in votes on key decisions and legislation in the Assembly which

necessitate cross-community support (e.g., the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, budget allocations, and Petitions of Concern).[1] This may take the form of 'parallel consent' (an overall majority of all MLAs and a majority of both nationalists and unionists) or a 'weighted majority' (60% of all MLAs and at least 40% of both nationalist and unionist MLAs). In effect, this provides both nationalists and unionists with a mutual veto 'designed to guarantee that the interests of both communities are upheld' (Jarrett, 2016: 417). Notably absent from cross-community voting rules is any numerical requirement *vis-à-vis* those members designated as 'others', hence McCulloch's (2014b: 506) argument that consociationalism in Northern Ireland embodies corporate elements. The final institutional feature worth highlighting relates to autonomy. Lijphart's 'segmented autonomy' takes the shape of educational group autonomy, manifest in the granting of equal funding to Catholic, Protestant, and integrated schools (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009: 349).

South Tyrol

South Tyrol (*Südtirol* in German and *Alto Adige* in Italian) is located in the Alps in the North of Italy, sharing a border with both Austria and Switzerland. It is an autonomous province, one of two that composes the autonomous region of Trentino-South Tyrol. Annexed from Austria by Italy at the end of World War One, South Tyrol is a predominantly German-speaking territory, albeit plays host to both Italian and Ladin speakers.[2] With the onslaught of fascism in the early 1920s, South Tyrol was subjected to phases of Italianisation; the German-language was largely prohibited from public life, place names were Italianised and thousands of Italians from elsewhere in Italy were resettled in the province (Lantschner 2008). In the aftermath of World War Two, an agreement was reached between Austria and Italy that would see South Tyrol remain part of Italy and Austria to relinquish any territorial claims to the province in return for autonomy provisions to protect German speakers in the province. In 1948 the Italian Parliament approved an autonomy statute for South Tyrol, but it failed to live up to the expectations of either German or Italian speakers and ultimately resulted in a brief campaign of violence and a radicalisation of territorial aspirations in favour of external self-determination on the part of some German speakers and political organisations (Lecours, 2021: 128).

Drawing the attention of the international community, specifically Austria's appeal to the United Nations, negotiations were kick-started in the 1960s and resulted in the creation of 'the package', 'a bundle of 137 legislative measures that was to redefine South Tyrol's position both within Italy and the special region' (Alber, 2021: 176). In 1972, the second Statute of Autonomy (ASt) came into force, creating a constitutionally entrenched power-sharing system based on both legally guaranteed separation and cooperation between the different language groups. In other words, 'the South Tyrol system works through a fine balance between the separation and preservation of the language groups and their identity, the forced cooperation of the groups, and, though with some limits, a certain degree of interaction and integration among the groups' (Carlà and Constantin, 2019: 178).

Based on the ASt, power in South Tyrol is shared by the three official linguistic groups – German, Italian and Ladin. The composition of government 'has to reflect the ethnic proportions of the provincial assembly', necessitating a coalition government between at least the German and Italian speaking parties (Wolff, 2005: 112). The Governor of the executive

[1] The Petition of Concern is a mechanism whereby 30 MLAs can request that a matter be passed on a cross-community rather than simple majority basis.

[2] At the last census in 2011, South Tyrol comprised 69% German-speakers, 26% Italian-speakers and 5% Ladin-speakers.

comes from the largest political party while three vice-presidents are also elected, each of whom represents a different language group.[3] In terms of proportionality, all citizens in South Tyrol are required to declare membership of an official language group which in turn is used to ensure proportional funding *vis-à-vis* public jobs and resources. A declaration of language group is also a requirement of provincial parliamentarians, which is thus used to allocate seats in parliament on a proportional basis. The Ladin community, given its numerical inferiority, is guaranteed a seat in the provincial parliament, albeit a position in the executive only arises when at least two deputies are elected to the legislative assembly (Carlà and Constantin, 2019: 165). The proportionality principle is further entrenched in the provincial parliament through a rotating presidency between German and Italian speakers during the parliamentary term.[4] There is no right to an absolute veto in the provincial parliament, but in the event a language group considers a law 'prejudicial to the quality of rights between citizens belonging to different language groups or to the ethnic or cultural characteristics of the groups themselves', a majority of parliamentarians belonging to a specific group can activate an alarm bell procedure to attempt to block such legislation (Alber, 2021: 184). Akin to Northern Ireland, cultural autonomy in South Tyrol is largely focused on education. Yet, while in Northern Ireland this is organised around the religious cleavage, in South Tyrol language groups are the organising principle. German and Italian speakers enjoy monolingual education (with the other language taught as a separate subject), while Ladin schools are bilingual, taught in both German and Italian, with Ladin taught as a separate subject (Carlà and Constantin, 2019: 167).

Comparing Consociational Dynamics in Northern Ireland and South Tyrol: Between Stability and Fragility

This section continues the comparison of the Northern Irish and South Tyrolean regimes, paying particular attention to the opportunities and challenges that power-sharing has offered both cases. With certain caveats in mind, it is not unreasonable to suggest that power-sharing has successfully transformed the conflicts in both cases. Given the absence of long-term violence in South Tyrol, the conflict has been more readily transformed, but politics has moved on in Northern Ireland too: 'the consociational institutions of Northern Ireland have meant that armed conflict has been swapped for portfolios and veto powers' (Tilley et al, 2021: 240).

Elite power-sharing as a conflict management strategy is no easy feat and while it has proved a more stable mechanism in South Tyrol, the same cannot be said for Northern Ireland. Tellingly, in South Tyrol collaboration between elites has resulted not just in political cooperation between different political parties and coalition partners, but has also had longer-term implications for societal co-existence, including a sustained level of mutual trust between language groups. Larin and Röggla (2019: 1032) argue that the principal reason for this has been a process of desecuritisation in the relationships among the three linguistic groups, as demonstrated with the 2017 Autonomy Convention whereby proposals to renegotiate the autonomy statute were 'not perceived as a threat, and [were] completed in a civil manner with no more than ideological conflict between the groups'. In essence, this hinted at the preponderance of 'normal, not ethnic politics' (ibid: 1018).

Conversely, events over the last 20 years in Northern Ireland suggest that mutual trust is in short supply. Since its establishment, the Assembly and Executive have either been in abeyance or suspended six times, most recently in 2022. The collapse in 2022, triggered by the

[3] The Ladin vice-presidency only comes into effect when a member of the Ladin community is a member of the government.

[4] A Ladin member can also become President if agreed to by either the German and Italian groups.

resignation of First Minister Paul Givan over post-Brexit arrangements for Northern Ireland, however, has affected only the Executive, with legislation passed by the Westminster Parliament allowing the Assembly to remain in place for at least six months, notwithstanding the absence of an Executive. The main success celebrated in Northern Ireland is the cessation of violence, which, although not completely eradicated, has been significantly reduced since 1998. Other notable successes include the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and the devolution of justice and policing powers in 2010 (Murtagh, 2021: 158). Further, contrary to perceptions that consociationalism merely entrenches difference, there is emerging evidence that political identities in Northern Ireland are moving beyond the unionist-nationalist dichotomy (Hayward and McManus 2019). The success of the non-ethnic Alliance Party in the 2019 local, European and Westminster elections lends further credence to this thesis (Tonge 2020). In South Tyrol, the Greens are the only inter-ethnic party but have had limited success in changing traditional voting behaviours and creating an inter-ethnic middle ground (Pallaver, 2017: 110). In this respect, the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland has been more successful, albeit as recent scholarship argues, there is significant scope for the party to widen its electoral support among those voters who eschew nationalist or unionist labels (Agarin and Jarrett 2021).

Notwithstanding some of the successes noted above, in Northern Ireland the consociational model itself has been blamed for creating and exacerbating instability in the political system (Nagle 2018). Elite cooperation has often resulted in brinkmanship rather than moderation, hence the various suspensions of the Assembly and Executive. Issues around flags, parades and the creation of an Irish Language Act have perpetuated deadlock between the main political parties, further entrenching ethnic differences between the groups. In South Tyrol, legally guaranteed separation – while an important mechanism to maintain the cultural identity of each group – has also worked to further entrench divisions between the three language groups. As Carlà (2018: 267) notes, 'South Tyrolean institutional mechanisms to protect minorities have created a bilingual territory but not a completely bilingual population'. With significant gulfs in terms of knowledge of both languages among many citizens, interaction between the different language groups is markedly limited.[5] What is more, finding the optimal balance between integration and separation is further complicated by disagreement among the language groups regarding proposals for multilingual education or monolingual toponyms.

A final limitation worth highlighting here relates to the 'exclusion amid inclusion' (EAI) dilemma found in consociational regimes not limited to the cases studied here (Agarin et al 2018). This tension, that 'the institutional inclusion of some groups necessarily results in the exclusion of others', resonates with the consociational configurations in both Northern Ireland and South Tyrol (ibid: 300). In Northern Ireland it refers to the privileging of the nationalist and unionist groups over those designated as 'others' in institutional procedures such as cross-community votes, as well as the marginalisation of 'issue-oriented others' like representatives from the LGBTQ+ community (Murtagh 2021). 'Others' is a designation also used in South Tyrol, but it typically refers to those who do not declare membership of any of the three official language groups, mixed persons/families (i.e., both German and Italian speaking) and foreign migrants. As Carlà and Constantin (2019: 174) point out, growing numbers of these groups in recent years have spotlighted the exclusionary nature of South Tyrolean autonomy, which has yet to consider seriously these emerging societal trends. To date, the EAI dilemma has proved more controversial in Northern Ireland than South Tyrol, but nonetheless illuminates ongoing tensions in consociational systems regarding both equality/inequality and rigidity/flexibility dichotomies.

[5] Carlà (2018: 263) shows that this is a bigger issue for Italian-speakers who are much less proficient in knowledge and speaking capabilities of the German language than of German-speakers regarding Italian.

The discussion hitherto has highlighted the Janus-faced nature of power-sharing regimes. While, on the one hand, the implementation of consociationalism in both Northern Ireland and South Tyrol has brought opportunities for the peaceful management and resolution of conflict, and progress, however slow, is identifiable in both cases, constraints and limitations remain, sometimes exacerbated by consociational arrangements. It is undeniable, however, with the conventional warning that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to conflict regulation (Keil and Anderson 2018), that both cases offer important insights as models of conflict resolution. They demonstrate that contrary to Mill's view, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious heterogeneity does not preclude the development of democracy in ethnically diverse societies, and, furthermore, show that beyond institutional innovations at the state level, power-sharing at the regional level can also be an effective means of accommodating ethnonational diversity.

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

Intractable conflicts, often appearing to be 'solution-proof', have become increasingly part and parcel of the international political arena. Across the globe, governments wrestle with questions of how to manage cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national and religious diversity, with many countries turning to autonomy and power-sharing to reconfigure state architecture in the aftermath of civil wars and political collapse. As the literature on the topic attests, there is no universal conflict management tool. Autonomy has become increasingly viewed as a tool of conflict management, but there is a growing consensus that it might not be enough to calm tensions and reconfigure state structures in deeply divided places. In this vein, power-sharing, as well as other institutional innovations such as symbolic recognition and trans-border institutions, have gained increasing traction as effective mechanisms in the conflict management and resolution toolkit (McGarry, 2019: 551).

On the one hand, power-sharing is considered effective in tempering majoritarianism, forestalling violence, building trust and entrenching democracy in deeply divided societies (Gagnon and Keating 2012). In implementing structures to balance centripetal and centrifugal forces and eschew monopolistic claims to power, power-sharing mechanisms can embolden the legitimacy and stability of state structures. On the other hand, power-sharing's conflict-ameliorating properties are sometimes treated with vociferous disdain, charged with entrenching difference, exacerbating tensions, intensifying violence and constraining democracy (Roeder and Rothchild 2005). Herein lies the paradox of power-sharing: it provides state structures and conciliatory practices to move beyond conflict but may also encourage political immobilism and jeopardise the long-term cohesiveness of the state.

As the comparative analysis in this chapter attests, power-sharing systems are 'works in progress', characterised by phases of trial and error, stops and starts and success and failure. The longevity of the South Tyrolean model, coupled with its success in decreasing ethnic tensions among the three official language groups, underlines its status as 'precedent-setting', albeit as the discussion above shows, arrangements have been slow to catch up with changing societal circumstances (Wolff, 2008: 329). In Northern Ireland, evaluations of power-sharing have been a lot less optimistic, more recently compounded by the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and the intensification of debate on Northern Ireland's constitutional future (Murphy and Evershed 2022). Over the last two decades, however, some progress has been made. Levels of political violence have been drastically reduced (notwithstanding recent post-Brexit flareups) and a middle-ground breakthrough beyond the nationalist-unionist cleavage is emerging. Further still, the durability of the model in South Tyrol offers some important insights for Northern Ireland; building mutual trust between politically antagonistic groups is

no mean feat, but neither is it an impossible task. Importantly, the experiences of power-sharing in Northern Ireland and South Tyrol offer potential lessons for other territories with self-determination disputes (see, Anderson 2021).

When employed as a tool of conflict management, power-sharing strategies have a lot to offer divided societies. Like any constitutional configuration, power-sharing has both its merits and demerits, and success is often hinged on historical particularities, contemporary context specificities and a range of other intervening variables. Power-sharing is not a panacea to address all political and social ills in divided places, but no doubt represents a powerful strategy to manage the complexities, contradictions and challenges of divided places.

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