The pitfalls of power sharing in a new democracy: the case of the National Party in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

A key political feature of South Africa's transformation was the African National Congress, the National Party and Inkatha Freedom Party working together in a grand coalition. This arrangement was praised by leading power-sharing theorist Arend Lijphart. The unity government began in 1994 but two years later the National Party withdrew. This article explores power sharing during the initial phase of the settlement and discusses three aspects of it. First, the South African example points to the electoral drawbacks of power sharing for minor parties. Second, the National Party's participation in the coalition stifled the early development of substantial political opposition which slowed the pace of democratic consolidation. Third, participation in a power-sharing arrangement undermined the National Party's electoral fortunes contributing to its dissolution in 2005. This was an unexpected outcome for a party which had co-authored the country's settlement a little over a decade earlier.

Keywords: Arend Lijphart, power-sharing, National Party, South Africa, ethno-racial party, electoral demise.

INTRODUCTION

Assessing the electoral pitfalls of a power-sharing settlement for a participating party is an important area of political science inquiry. Yet it is one which has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. The Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa presents an interesting case study for exploring the negative effects of political power sharing. Concentrating on the 1994–1996 period, when the unity government comprised the African National Congress (ANC), the National Party (NP) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), offers insights into the challenges parties face depending upon the amount of electoral clout they possess. It also points to the problems that can emerge when it comes to the robust political representation of the interests of a party's core constituency. This, in turn, encourages discussion about the process of democratic

consolidation and the importance of oppositional politics in the early phase of a settlement. These are useful insights which both improve our theoretical understanding of the inter-party dynamics of sharing power and add to our empirical understanding of actual power-sharing relations in a deeply divided society.

If measured in terms of conflict resolution, South Africa's Interim Constitution of 1993, which created the constitutional basis for power sharing, was a success. The international community responded to the settlement with much praise as it laid the basis for a transformation which has been described as a miracle (Waldmeir 1997). The transformation was accompanied by the offer of a new South African identity – captured in the term 'Rainbow Nation'. Certainly, the transformation was momentous and ended the problem of political violence. Power sharing (a term that will be used interchangeably in this article with consociationalism) found expression in the form of the GNU and was a core institutional feature of the political transition. A grand coalition was formed comprising of the ANC, the NP and the IFP. The GNU was not intended to be a permanent feature of the country's politics and was constitutionally restricted to a period of five years. The permanent constitution, which had been agreed in 1996, made no provision for formal power sharing. However, only two years into the settlement the NP withdrew from the GNU. While this was a blow to power sharing it was limited in its effects as it neither weakened the constitution nor did it result in a recurrence of inter-ethnic violence – a not uncommon consequence of power sharing failure in Africa. Yet, the NP's withdrawal raises questions about a model that Arend Lijphart celebrated both in terms of his theory of consociationalism and its specific South African manifestation. Using the example of the NP, this article highlights three points: first, Lijphart's model of power-sharing does not adequately allow for its electoral drawbacks, suggesting a theoretical refinement is called for. Second, the development of a dynamic opposition politics was stifled by the functioning of the GNU which slowed the pace of democratic consolidation. Finally, the South African example indicates how participation in a power-sharing arrangement can play a part in damaging a party's electoral fortunes despite the fact that it was fundamental to the country's political transformation.

POWER SHARING AS A CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODEL: AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE

Power sharing in societies which are deeply divided along ethnic lines has, as Binningsbo (2013: 89) comments, become a 'dominant approach to solving conflict' and is 'recommended as a political solution to overcome deep divisions between groups'. These are societies where there exist two key problems: first, the legitimacy of the state is questioned by a sizeable portion of the population, and second, inter-ethnic differences have the potential to ignite political violence (Guelke 2012).

In his detailed review of power-sharing forms of democracy, Andewag (2000) highlights how these models have been a common feature of societies that are

fractured by politically significant inter-ethnic differences. So, to cite a few examples, it is not surprising that power sharing is fundamental to the Northern Ireland settlement (McGarry & O'Leary 2004); that it is the core aspect of the regulation of politics in Lebanon (Kerr 2005); a necessary facet of political design in Afghanistan (Katzman 2015) and was attempted in Iraq (Philips 2005) – although the original design is now in tatters. As a stabilising mechanism it has been used in Kenya and Zimbabwe (Cheeseman & Tendi 2010) and more broadly in Africa (Cheeseman 2011). Certainly, power sharing is a key tool in the toolbox of democratisation, but as Lynch & Crawford (2011) point out, while progress has been made since 1990, efforts to spread democracy in sub-Saharan Africa have encountered many setbacks.

Critics of consociationalism argue that it hinders the process of democratisation by embedding ethnic differences in political structures, and indeed, this critique emerged in South Africa both during the negotiations and shortly afterwards (Taylor 1992; Connors 1996). But no two consociational models are the same. It is therefore useful to consider the literature on other examples of power sharing – with a focus on Africa – in order to put South Africa's arrangement into comparative context. This will help identify the particular features that pertained to the South African case. Of course, contextual distinctions in power-sharing examples suggest that a single model of consociationalism cannot be rolled out as a remedy for ethnic conflict. Instead, power sharing is best considered a tailored response to the needs of a specific context.

Horowitz (2014) warns that power sharing is problematic because ethnic parties compete vigorously with each other in pursuit of their supporters' interests. This can lead to political instability. Horowitz's point sets limitations to what consociationalism can achieve, but interestingly, while the NP's example indicates that membership of a grand coalition can help minimise the potential for politically fragmenting and stability-threatening inter-party competition, this may not serve the long-term electoral interests of a party. Accordingly, Mehler (2009: 453–4) adopts a cautious approach to the idea that consociationalism is a cure-all for conflict, arguing that in Africa 'power-sharing agreements cannot provide sustainable solutions to all relevant aspects of complex crisis situations'. Adding to the problem of complexity is that of state weakness – a common problem in Africa – leading Sriram & Zahar (2009) to claim that power-sharing efforts are likely to falter in weak or collapsed states.

Spears (2000, 2002) notes how a recurrence of violence following a settlement has not been an infrequent problem on the African continent. In a more recent article, Spears (2013) documents a dismal series of power-sharing failures – Sudan, Angola, Rwanda and Sierra Leone – yet comments that where there are sturdy institutional structures, for example during regime change in South Africa, it supports a successful transition. In fact, Spears points out how it was possible for the NP to walk away from the GNU because it was 'confident that, even outside of the government, whites would have their interests protected' (Spears 2013: 40). While this analysis of attitudes within the NP in 1996 is accurate, Spears does not account for the evaporation

of support for the party which indicated that whites were not sufficiently confident that the NP was the party best able to offer the protection sought.

Mehler, and also Sriram & Zahar as well as Spears are not alone in their power-sharing pessimism in Africa. Lemarchand (2007: 2) recognises that 'much of the continent has become a graveyard of consociational experiments' but considers Burundi to be the closest approximation to Lijphart's model and an example which carries hope for the implementation of power sharing elsewhere. However, since Lemarchand's analysis, Burundian politics has taken a turn for the worse. Despite the country's laudable attempt to manage ethnic divisions via institutional scaffolding, Vandeginste (2014) perceptively questioned the sustainability of its arrangements and problems emerged shortly afterwards. In 2015 President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his intention to run for a third term in office. This led to an eruption of political violence which resulted in multiple killings (*The Telegraph* 2016). According to the UNHCR (2017), since April 2015, 420,689 Burundian refugees had fled to neighbouring countries. Despite the apparent success of Burundian power sharing, it was unable to prevent this crisis. Violence has also bedevilled Africa's newest nation, South Sudan. In the relatively recent history of southern Sudan, ethnic violence has been a perennial problem since 1991 (Hutchinson 2001). However, following the creation of the new state in 2011, tribalism has continued to be a significant factor in the mobilisation of violence which has blighted the country (Pinaud 2014). This brings to one's attention the insightful comments of the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (1940: 161) who, when addressing the potential destructiveness of tribal divisions in this region of Africa said: 'Between tribes there can only be war, and through war, the memory of war, and the potentiality of war the relations between tribes are defined and expressed.' It is lamentable that Evan-Pritchard's pessimism at the dawn of the 1940s has an empirical relevance in the 21st century which, unfortunately, is not confined to South Sudan but has been widespread in Africa following decolonisation.

In their review of power-sharing settlements, Ottmann & Vullers (2015) make the point that there are major differences between the promises and practices of such arrangements. This is an interesting observation and the commentators' argument is germane to the case of the NP in that the party experienced a disjuncture between its expectations of what sharing power would entail and what actually unfolded. The spirit of consensus, which initially had been the driving force of decision making in the GNU, had largely evaporated by 1996. This soured the relationship between De Klerk and Mandela and was a key factor in the NP leaving the unity government.

Yet, although power sharing has its challenges and drawbacks it still offers ethnic antagonists an opportunity to construct peace. Thus Hartzell & Hoddie (2015: 38) contend that it reduces the 'uncertainty associated with democracy' and persuades 'actors emerging from civil war … to adopt at least a minimally democratic political system'. These authors argue that critics of power sharing simply underestimate the barriers which lie in the path of

deepening democracy in a post-settlement context. A positive interpretation of power sharing is also embraced by Sisk & Stefes (2005) who view its accommodation in South Africa's Interim Constitution of 1993 as vital to conflict resolution. Although the GNU's operation was limited by a five-year sunset clause (which for the NP did not last beyond two) they argue that this period was sufficient to build confidence amongst the country's minority groups, namely, that the ANC did not intend to establish a majoritarian dictatorship.

The leading advocate of power sharing, Arend Lijphart, has remained unfazed by his opponents' arguments and undeterred in the face of critiques of the consociational model. Like Hartzell & Hoddie, he views power sharing as a practical compromise between competing ethnic parties – advanced by their elites – which have more to gain than lose from sharing power. Lijphart has gone so far as to claim that 'consociational democracy is not only the most optimal form of democracy for deeply divided societies but also, for the most deeply divided countries, the only feasible solution' (Lijphart 2002: 37).

A major reservation harboured by critics of power sharing is the impediment it is thought to present to the development of a vibrant political opposition. Indeed, in contradistinction to the position adopted by Sisk & Stefes (2005) mentioned above, Jung & Shapiro (1995) launch a major critique of Lijphart's approval of power sharing in South Africa's Interim Constitution. They comment: 'Lijphart celebrates South Africa's new consociational institutions as "just about the best that could have been designed," urging that they be replicated in the final constitution. This is wrongheaded advice' (Jung & Shapiro 1995: 299–300). It is 'wrongheaded' because these commentators consider a strong opposition to be central to a healthy and stable democracy. While critics' concerns are not without substance, it is important to bear in mind that South Africa's political negotiations were primarily driven by the need to resolve a vicious conflict which had the potential to worsen (arguably this point is not afforded the weight of consideration it deserves in Jung & Shapiro's analysis). As a result, a fixed-term power-sharing settlement was agreed.

THE NP AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before delving more deeply into the topic, it is useful to account for the history of the NP. Prior to the non-racial elections of 1994, the political philosophy of the NP was dominated by the importance of race. Upon coming to power in 1948 its values were manifested in a raft of laws which segregated South Africans along racial lines. Apartheid was met with international condemnation. Disapproval was expressed in a range of sanctions (Guelke 2005). However, following the election of F.W. de Klerk in 1989 the party adopted a reformist strategy. This paved the way toward difficult inter-party negotiations which eventually resulted in a political settlement. The settlement notwithstanding, it was not altogether easy for the NP to shake the dust of apartheid from its feet. Yet, importantly, this acknowledgement does not imply that the demise of the party can be explained solely in terms of a 'natural' electoral death

due to the NP finding itself in a non-racial democratic environment where the taint of its racist past rendered it ill-equipped to compete. There are two reasons which support this claim. First, it needs to be remembered that apartheid South Africa was a democracy for whites and the majority were content to give their electoral allegiance to the NP and its policies. The option to vote for South Africa's anti-apartheid liberal tradition was available to whites, but as Giliomee (2006) documents, relatively few found this option appealing. Second, the party's racist history did not prevent the vast majority of whites voting for it in the 1994 non-racial elections even though the robustness of the Interim Constitution of 1993 would likely have dissipated white anxiety about ANC rule. More broadly, of course, white concern about the ANC's flirting with the international bogeyman of communism evaporated when the system disintegrated a few years earlier. Certainly, the dissolution of communism made it less difficult for de Klerk to embark on a process of reform (Guelke 1996).

In the light of the racial dynamics which underpinned, and continue to underpin, voter preferences (Knox & Quirk 2000; Ferree 2004, 2006; Guelke 2005; Garcia-Rivero 2006; Holborn 2010) the NP won a respectable 20.4% of the vote in a greatly enlarged electorate. This result informs us that, at the beginning of the new era, the NP was far from being electorally doomed because of its past racism. Had it been so, then it is plausible to assume that the 1994 election results would have indicated such. Therefore, to argue that the NP's history condemned it to electoral annihilation, which is an argument some members of the scholarly community might favour, is not supported by the electoral facts. Consequently, other reasons for the party's decline need to be explored. Following the first non-racial election, however, the party's demise was relatively swift as subsequent election results confirm: in 1999 the NP's strength plummeted to 6.7% and dropped to a disastrous 1.6%. Against this embarrassing backdrop it is unsurprising that the party decided to dissolve itself in 2005 (Meldrum 2005). The NP indisputably qualified as an ethnic party (Horowitz 1985) in that it was systematically supported by members of the Afrikaner community but it was also an ethno-racial party due to the support it received from English-speaking whites. However, the election results make clear that a massive rift had developed between the party and its long-standing support base.

It is argued here that a major – but not exclusive – reason for the party's decline was its participation in the GNU. In this respect, power sharing had its pitfalls. These can be understood in terms of the role of oppositional politics which revolves around the hardy defence of the interests of a party's core vote. In the case of the NP, its supporters were chiefly Afrikaner and white English speakers but membership of the power-sharing government complicated its efforts to defend such groups. This aspect of power sharing has not been satisfactorily accounted for in Lijphart's model, thus a refinement of his theory is recommended. Also, scholarly critiques of consociationalism do not focus directly and in a detailed sense on the question of a party's electoral fortunes in

a post-settlement power-sharing context. Hence, this paper's focus on the concrete case of the NP adds an interesting dimension to the literature on power-sharing settlements.

THE GNU AND THE OPERATION OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION

By the measure of other democracies where coalition governments are in operation, political opposition in South Africa took an unusual form after the 1994 elections. The ANC, NP and IFP participated in the GNU and between them received the vast support of the electorate. The ANC won 252 seats whilst the NP won 82. The IFP won 43 and ended up with three cabinet seats in the GNU compared with the NP's six. Both parties were overshadowed by the ANC's 18 cabinet seats. In terms of parliamentary seats this resulted in a very lopsided balance in favour of the – ANC, NP, IFP – coalition government. On this point Spence (1997: 529) comments: 'The remaining political parties, with 23 parliamentary seats out of a total of 400, constituted the opposition.' Clearly, those constituting the opposition were dwarfed by parties making up what Lijphart refers to as a grand coalition. Additionally, the opposition was fragmented. It consisted of such diverse parties as the Freedom Front (nine seats) which was somewhat unwelcoming of the new era in that it advocated territorial separatism and the creation of an Afrikaner *Volkstaat*; the Democratic Party (seven seats) that represented the liberal white tradition during apartheid but which had been decisively beaten by the NP; the Pan Africanist Congress (five seats) whose traditional Africanist position made the party less comfortable with the settlement than the ANC; and the newly formed African Christian Democratic Party (with only two seats and 0.45% of the vote). Therefore, a combination of ideological fragmentation and small size rendered political opposition weak in parliament.

The coalition landslide did, of course, serve the needs of political stability and this point should not be glossed over when considering the needs of conflict-ridden societies. More specifically, it assisted in terms of securing executive-level stability amidst the uncertainties of the transition. In an article which amounted to a series of power-sharing recommendations vis-à-vis its best practice in deeply divided societies, Lijphart discusses the problems which executives can encounter in parliamentary systems when the opposition becomes negative in its attitude towards the government. He says the 'fact that cabinets depend on majority support in parliament and can be dismissed by parliamentary votes of no-confidence may lead to cabinet instability – and, as a result, regime instability' (Lijphart 2004: 103). However, with a massive 337 parliamentary seats linked to the three parties comprising the power-sharing executive, the kind of opposition which Lijphart identifies as being deleterious to cabinet stability was minimised. In a society with a history of violent racial discord this was undoubtedly beneficial.

However, although important, it is but one measure of the political arrangement. If the grand coalition is assessed in terms of its impact on the NP's

electoral success then another conclusion might be drawn. To a significant degree this was because of the constraints imposed by the power-sharing settlement which complicated the role of political opposition. As will be discussed below, the NP was constricted when it came to strong representation of voters' interests. The emphasis on coalition unity dispossessed the party of the kind of independence necessary to provide tough criticism of ANC-dominated policies. As a result the NP was unable to manage its voters' expectations.

When accounting for the nature of political opposition at this time it is important to note that the South African power-sharing settlement was a compromise. Lijphart (1998) states that it caused the ANC to concede ground on what formerly had been a position based on simple majoritarian democracy. Spence (1997) discusses the pragmatism underpinning the ANC's approach during the negotiations. He argues that the reason for the ANC's toleration of power sharing was due to its recognition that the NP had a crucial part to play if the transition was to begin on a more solid footing than would otherwise have been the case had it been excluded from executive-level decision making. Had the negotiations established a Westminster-like 'winner takes all' electoral system rather than a power-sharing one then the NP (and the IFP) would have been excluded from government. Spence (1997: 529) explains: 'Nelson Mandela and his ANC colleagues were willing to accept the principle of a constitutionally prescribed coalition largely because the ANC required cooperation from the NP if the loyalty of the bureaucracy and the security forces was to be guaranteed' – a point that will be touched upon in the next section. Hence, as Spence points out, the ANC did not have much confidence in the idea of a 'loyal opposition' emerging from the 1994 elections and thought it wiser to work with the NP than risk the consequences of not doing so. NP marginalisation may have resulted in wider white alienation and threatened a loss of confidence in the settlement. Also, Pottie (2001) discusses the rationality underpinning the ANC's acceptance of power sharing and emphasises the economic benefits of a politically stable South Africa. But, while ANC pragmatism played a significant part in the equation, there was another side to power sharing and in this respect Spence refers to the GNU as setting an important inter-party reconciliatory example for the wider society which, of course, would benefit all parties and not only the ANC.

The power-sharing agreement also allowed the ANC to draw upon the considerable governmental experience of the NP. In correspondence with the author, former NP politician, Ray Radue, explains the usefulness of the NP to the ANC in the GNU:

In the very early stages of the GNU it must be appreciated that the ANC were completely new to government especially in a relatively sophisticated country. It was therefore understandable that the new President Nelson Mandela and his ANC colleagues in Cabinet would listen to the NP Cabinet ministers and especially Deputy President de Klerk who had years of experience in government and even accept advice on the many issues confronting the country. (Radue, personal communication, 8.8.2015)

This relationship did not last. The massive democratic mandate of the ANC meant that it was in a powerful position to determine the direction of South African politics. It was inevitable that, as the ANC became more familiar with running the country and implementing policy, its reliance on the NP would decline. Radue discusses the effects of this as follows:

As time went on the President and his colleagues grew in confidence, took less and less advice from the NP component and set their own course of government for the country. Deputy President de Klerk and his colleagues felt more and more uncomfortable in government and finally felt obliged to choose to serve as a full blown opposition in Parliament. (Radue, personal communication, 8.8.2015)

Radue's comment that de Klerk and NP cabinet ministers became 'uncomfortable in government' points to the challenges senior members of the party encountered in the GNU and which led them to serve as a 'full blown opposition'. However, the opposition space envisaged by de Klerk had increasingly been occupied by the Democratic Party (discussed below) to an advantage that was evident in the second democratic election results three years later.

THE CHALLENGES OF POWER SHARING IN THE GNU

Participating in the GNU prevented the NP from grounding itself firmly as the official opposition party (a status it had earned by winning 20.4% of the vote in the 1994 elections). Its failure to develop a distinctive party character proved costly by the time of the 1999 elections. It indicates that the NP did not strike the sort of balance which Martin & Vanberg (2008: 503) say is necessary for 'successful coalition governance'. The balance involves making compromises which render coalition politics possible yet 'maintaining the party's public profile and convincing supporters' that it continues to defend their interests.

Opposition has a core role to play in the politics of a democracy. In his survey of the functions of political opposition in new nations, Apter's (1962) analysis was informed by three key observations: that of the opposition's 'representation of interests'; its 'provision of information'; and last, that of providing 'constructive criticism' of the government. Apter's emphasis on the importance of the representative and critical aspects of opposition are especially relevant to this article and helps create a framework within which to discuss the NP's role in the GNU.

First, despite the fact that the NP opened up its membership to all racial groups in 1990, it was still recognised as a 'white' party and more specifically an Afrikaner party. Its membership was predominantly white and its leadership Afrikaner – so it had a distinct interest-base to represent. That these interests emanated from a minority base, both racially and ethnically defined, is also significant. Given the momentous nature of the transition and the shift in power from one racial group to another (physically and emotionally segregated by over four decades of apartheid policies) it is unsurprising that both Afrikaners and English-speaking whites were concerned about their place in the new society. It is worth bearing in mind that research conducted in 1988

by Manzo & McGowan (1992) highlighted Afrikaner anxiety about a non-racial South Africa. Additionally, a not insignificant portion of whites had voted 'no' in the 1992 referendum (Strauss 1993) and did so because they harboured reservations about the effects that a transfer of political power would have on minorities. This rejectionist section of white society as well as whites who naturally were anxious about the implications of a transfer of power (including other minority communities who voted for the NP in 1994) are likely to have preferred focused political leadership and a committed oppositional approach post-1994. Simply put, there was much for the NP to represent at the level of minority interests.

A sturdy defence of minority interests is likely to have resulted in the NP acquiring a reputation as a strong opposition party. However, along with the IFP, the NP entered the GNU as a minor party. This coalition of the country's main parties was celebrated by Lijphart (1994). It was a negotiated outcome which fitted comfortably with his power-sharing theory. In *Democracy in Plural Societies* Lijphart (1977: 25) discussed the coalition idea as follows: 'The first and most important element is government by a grand coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the plural society.' Although it can take a number of forms the 'grand coalition cabinet in a parliamentary system' (25) was the version adopted in South Africa. But the power-sharing model takes on a different complexion when its mathematics are considered along with its implications for the exercise of influence: with 18 cabinet seats the ANC had triple that of the NP's six which resulted in ANC dominance (the IFP was less well off with three seats). De Klerk pointed to the marginalisation of the party as a factor in the NP's withdrawal from the power-sharing arrangement: 'The National Party has felt for some time now that our influence within the Government of National Unity has been declining. The ANC is acting more and more as if they no longer need multi-party government' (Deseret News 1996). De Klerk's comment does not cast a favourable light on the consensual basis upon which decisions within the GNU were to be made. This was an approach to decision making that de Klerk states was agreed between him and Mandela and an arrangement which, at least initially, had operated with relative smoothness (de Klerk 1999: 270). However, power within the GNU was a numbers game and the superior number of cabinet seats occupied by the ANC rendered it dominant.

In addition to the grand coalition aspect of Lijphart's power-sharing theory he also refers to the use of a 'mutual veto … which serves as an additional protection of vital minority interests' (Lijphart 1977: 25). However, as Guelke (2012) points out, there was no veto mechanism in the GNU for the NP to use. Despite Lijphart's applause of the settlement, the absence of a veto constituted a missing strand in the application of his theoretical model to the power-sharing executive. This fact adds substance to Guelke's (2012: 89) claim that the GNU amounted to a 'very watered down version of power-sharing' and 'for a temporary period' to boot. The comments of two senior NP politicians illustrate the concern felt by the absence of a veto. Tertius Delport (*BBC* 1995) remarked 'so the key question now was what will they [NP ministers]

do in cabinet? To what extent will they be in a position to influence or even to veto particular decisions?' He continued:

It was indicated that no voting in fact would take place which would mean that our representatives in cabinet would be in a position to influence, to persuade, but would have no final say or veto of any kind and I disagreed with that.

Delport met with President de Klerk regarding the matter and stated his concern that 'we may … end up, as the National Party being co-opted into an ANC government' (*BBC* 1995). Rina Venter (*BBC* 1995) had similar concerns:

Our policy was power sharing. It was supposed to give minority groups like ours real influence but this did not materialise. The best we can say we achieved was representation in cabinet. Apparently, we can try to influence decisions there by force of presence.

Clearly, neither politician was content with this aspect of the agreement but the absence of a veto avoided what Rothchild & Roeder (2005) identify as the problematic misuse of this device by politicians who represent minority groups. Yet without a veto the GNU, as a central piece of the negotiated settlement, would operate with the kind of fluidity that accommodates the emergence of 'new power relationships' and 'new status positions' (Du Toit 2003: 106). Hence, veto-less, what emerged in terms of power and status between 1994 and 1996 favoured the ANC and not the NP.

Perhaps the NP's predicament within the GNU, namely, that it could be easily overshadowed by the ANC, is a simple reflection of South Africa's racial demographics and dynamics, coupled with the fact that there are *particular* constituencies from which parties draw their support. Basically, with 62.6% of the vote in 1994 the ANC did not need the support of the NP to form a government so the GNU was not like coalition relationships in other societies. If necessary, the ANC had the popular support and parliamentary numbers to go it alone. This led Giliomee *et al.* (2001: 167) to argue that because the ANC had massive black support it did not need to 'win the vote of the white minority and can treat it with indifference or contempt'. Further, these commentators suggest that de Klerk overestimated the importance of the NP in the post-settlement period. They argue that during the negotiations the leader of the NP 'hoped that his party would continue to play a strategic role in a … (GNU) well beyond a second free election' (Giliomee *et al.* 2001: 165). This hope was premised on the shaky belief that the NP would serve as an intermediary link between the ANC and vital white business interests, as well as white civil servants and the white security forces. That de Klerk was firmly of this belief was evident in a speech he gave following the election results in 1994 and before participation in the GNU: 'Just as we could not rule South Africa effectively without the support of the ANC and its supporters' the former President argued 'no Government will be able to rule South Africa effectively without the support of the people and the institutions that I represent'.[1] It was thought that the ANC could not afford to alienate these facets of white society who would insist on the NP's participation at the centre of government. This need did not materialise and the ANC was

capable of both pacifying white anxieties and demonstrating, especially after the NP's departure from the GNU in 1996, that it could run the country. As mentioned above, the governmental experience of the NP undoubtedly assisted the ANC in terms of consolidating its position during the first two years of the GNU. This served the electoral interests of the ANC more than it did the NP.

Lijphart (1998: 147) accepts that in South Africa 'consociationalism has declined since 1996' and recognises that the NP left the GNU because of the 'predominant power of the ANC in this power-sharing cabinet'. Despite this, he did not drill down into the dynamics of the NP's subservient role. Neither did he speculate upon the electoral challenges of being involved in the GNU. Spence (1997) was clear that there were potential electoral dangers in the NP becoming too aligned with the ANC and thus too uncritical of ANC-led policies. Overall, the sharp decline in support for the NP between 1994 and 2004 speaks powerfully of voter alienation whilst the significant drop in electoral backing between 1994 and 1999 suggests that Spence's analysis was perceptive.

Whilst Lijphart (2004) briefly refers to the unity government in South Africa in an article designed to offer recommendations to societies which are considering adopting a power-sharing model, he makes no mention of the possible electoral costs for participating parties. By the time Lijphart's article was written, the results of the 1999 elections provided empirical evidence that the NP had suffered a massive loss in support, thus prompting the question: did power sharing have a part to play in the party's demise? However, whilst acknowledging Lijphart's major contribution to scholarship in this area, failure to account for the possible electoral snares of power-sharing constitutes something of a blind spot in his theory which ought to be addressed.

Prior to presenting his recommendations for constitutional design in divided societies, it would have been profitable for Lijphart (2004) to reflect on the possible electoral effects of power sharing on minor parties. Accordingly, an inspection of De Klerk's comments when announcing the NP's departure from the GNU would have been worthwhile as they lacked ambiguity. For example, former NP cabinet member during the apartheid era, Leon Wessels (2008: 57), records de Klerk's parliamentary announcement on 3 June 1996, that the NP was leaving the GNU:

Continued participation would be equivalent to detention on a kind of political death row. The survival of multi-party democracy, which depends on the existence of a strong and credible opposition, was being threatened by our continued participation in the GNU.

Lijphart might also have considered the reflections of the NP's Roelf Meyer regarding the constraints of power sharing. Meyer, who had a cabinet seat in the GNU, said:

It affected not only the National Party, but also the ANC. Whatever we did, we had to be aware of each other. Now we will have a real opportunity to express ourselves on every matter where we differ from the ANC. (Hill 1996)

DISCUSSION

What lessons can be drawn from the South African example which might lead to a refinement of the theory of consociationalism? To begin, there were electoral pitfalls in the power-sharing settlement for the NP which its leaders were unsuspecting of. The party's involvement in the GNU militated against the development of a distinct presence in the new democracy. This is an outcome that Lijphart does not sufficiently allow for with regards to minor parties in power-sharing settlements. However, things could have been different for the NP: in 1994 the electorate provided a mandate for the party to become the official opposition with a reasonably hefty vote that scooped up the support of the minority communities. Therefore, the NP had a well-defined support base and could have remained outside the GNU had it wished. By staying out, the party could have adopted a parliamentary *modus operandi* characterised by a vigorous oppositional approach: ANC policy could have been challenged during the formulation stage and the effectiveness of its policies evaluated following their implementation. Instead, the NP became too closely aligned – as a minor political player – to the ANC, making it less easy to present a forthright defence of its supporters' interests. Lijphart has not suitably factored this into his theory either. When the NP, having finally realised that its role in the GNU was unproductive, announced its intention to withdraw, it had failed to capitalise on the first two years of the transition. If former British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, is correct in his ominous counsel that 'a week is a long time in politics', then two years drifting in an unrewarding direction might prove to be electorally fatal. Similar to the cut and thrust of competitive politics in all democracies, this was a period which the NP could have used to its advantage. The ANC's inexperience in government may well have caused a slip or two policy-wise. This could have been pounced upon and critiqued in a manner that enhanced the NP's parliamentary profile. Instead, the constraints of the GNU, as the NP's Roelf Meyer's comment above indicates, rendered the party unable to adopt an independent critical line. This damaged the NP's image amongst the white electorate which resulted in a haemorrhaging of support. Yet, the problem was deeper: in the absence of the kind of scrutiny the NP could have brought to bear on ANC policies, the cause of deepening democracy was hampered.

The NP's failure played into the hands of another 'white' party that embraced the idea of political opposition and which did a skilled job at harnessing the sense of alienation experienced by whites and other minority groups. The Democratic Party, under the leadership of Tony Leon, made quick inroads into the NP's core constituency. The party's unambiguous and aggressive 'Fight Back' slogan, by which it contested the 1999 elections, served to rally both alienated Afrikaners and English-speaking whites in support of a meaningful oppositional voice. That this has been a vote-winning formula is evidenced in the fact that the DP/DA witnessed its vote rise in each election since 1994 (with the exception of 2019 when the party lost support). Neither did the party need

to belong to a power-sharing set-up to boost its appeal. In fact, when President Mandela offered cabinet seats in the GNU to the DP in 1996 the party declined, preferring to remain on the opposition benches. This constituted a bold response which paid an electoral dividend.

Participation in power sharing resulted in the NP concentrating on the dynamics of coalition politics rather than keeping a healthy eye on the rise of its main competitor for the white vote, namely, the DP. This encourages us to consider how taking part in a grand coalition caused the NP to underestimate the challenge of the DP between 1994 and 1999. Two explanatory points can be made concerning this. First, as co-creator of a momentous transformation the NP was carried along with the national and international euphoria which accompanied it (Giliomee 2003). Understanding why this was so has three dimensions: (1) F.W. de Klerk, along with Nelson Mandela, had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his peacemaking efforts and this elevated the NP at home and abroad; (2) the outcome of the 1992 referendum indicated that the majority of the white community was willing to alter its identity, at least to the point of ending racial discrimination, thus paving the way for a new South Africa; (3) the 20.4% of electoral support it received in 1994 testified to the confidence that whites (and other minority groups) had in the party despite its racist history – these were confidence-building factors that emboldened the NP in the early phase of the transition. Second, the party's misjudgement of the threat posed by its electoral competitor reflects the self-confidence of an ethno-racial party which had always been able to draw upon a loyal pool of supporters. However, the NP did not allow for the fluidity of this support base in the context of a transformed political environment wherein another 'white' party offered voters an alternative vision of stout opposition politics. Unshackled by the complications and restrictions of power sharing, the DP was free to offer such a vision. It is important to note that the NP was not outflanked by a right-wing party. With regards to Afrikaners, they had the option to vote for a purely Afrikaner party in the form of the Freedom Front (later to become the Freedom Front Plus), which embraced territorial separatism as an ethnic ideal. Instead, the NP was outplayed by a party that had gained increasing esteem amongst whites because of its willingness to stand up to the ANC.

Yet, from a comparative perspective, unlike many other efforts at consociationalism in Africa, power sharing in South Africa, whilst unhelpful to the NP in the areas described above, undoubtedly aided the transition. As we have seen, the literature on power sharing in the continent points to its ineffectiveness at resolving inter-ethnic conflict – Lemarchand's (2007) remark that much of Africa could be described as a graveyard of power-sharing experiments is felicitous in this respect. South Africa, however, has not fallen foul of a recurrence of political violence and this has been achieved in the absence of embedded structures of consociationalism. Given the depth of the country's racial divisions, which were reinforced during the decades of the apartheid regime, this fact may be considered something of an irony, but a welcome one. Twenty-six years into the settlement, the country demonstrates that long-term

power sharing was not indispensable to an overall peaceful outcome. Yet, this was not the expectation of pundits – certainly not Lijphart – during the state of emergency in the 1980s. This point in no way suggests that divided societies should avoid the application of power-sharing models when it comes to conflict resolution experiments. Rather, it indicates that consociationalism is not indispensable to conflict resolution efforts.

There are a number of areas unrelated to the GNU which probably contributed to reducing support for the NP and these are worth brief consideration. The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which began its investigations from 1996–1998, received much national and international coverage. Its report was published the year prior to the 1999 general elections and brought to national and international attention the abuses of human rights committed by security forces (the ANC was also judged guilty of human rights abuses). The Commission's findings had a damaging effect on the self-perception of Afrikaners (Krog 1998) many of whom, as Vestergaard (2001) argues, felt their identity to have been severely tarnished. As the party of government throughout the apartheid period, the NP had problems extricating itself from blame. The party's historic success and dominant status since 1948 now amounted to something of a moral liability for many Afrikaners – especially its younger members – as they attempted to adapt to the post-apartheid environment. The moral shockwave caused by the TRC likely disinclined many Afrikaners to support the NP in the general elections of 1999 (and 2004) – a far cry from the party's electoral experience in 1994.

De Klerk's decision to resign from politics in 1996 undoubtedly unsettled some of the NP's traditional supporters who did not place much confidence in his replacement: the relatively inexperienced 37-year-old, Marthinus van Schalkwyk. De Klerk may have emerged within the apartheid system but he was nonetheless a reformist politician. With over a quarter of a century of political experience to draw upon (and now free to engage in proper oppositional politics), he would have been seen as someone capable of wise navigation of the post-apartheid environment with its new challenges – for the identity of Afrikaners and whites generally – of liberalism, de-segregation, non-racialism and reintegration into the international community.

Two other areas are likely to have resulted in voter disaffection with the NP. One of these was linguistic and the other economic. After 1994 Afrikaners grew increasingly anxious about the future of Afrikaans (Giliomee 2003), which they viewed as being threatened by the increased use of English. Concern about linguistic loss reflected badly on the NP as the settlement was poor on cultural protectionism. It was not difficult for Afrikaners to consider the NP to have emasculated itself by virtue of its two-year involvement in the GNU, thus making the DP's 'Fight Back' slogan in the 1999 elections all the more attractive. The DP's appeal, which did not exist in the 1994 elections, needs to be seen in the context of creeping Afrikaner and white English-speakers' alienation with the NP's lack of post-settlement leadership. Economically speaking, the ANC's Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme, which placed an emphasis

on addressing the racial imbalance in the workplace that years of apartheid had created, resulted in whites beginning to experience unemployment. However, unlike affirmative action policies in other countries where they promote the economic interests of minority groups, in South Africa it functions in the interests of a very large black majority. The demographic framework within which BEE operates probably contributed to the emergence of a negative perception of the policy amongst whites who, as a small racial minority, confronted the less pleasant aspects of the transition. Whites bitten by economic hardship were disinclined to support the NP. A combination of the above factors undoubtedly contributed to the party's dreadful performances in the elections of 1999 and 2004.

CONCLUSION

If we accept that the fundamental goal of a political party is to secure its electoral survival then this article offers another, less attractive, perspective on South Africa's power-sharing settlement. This is because participation in the GNU can be seen to have played a part in damaging the NP. The example of the party indicates that the consociational model has pitfalls which can actually impede the process of democratic consolidation by *confusing* and rendering indistinct the role of parties in a power-sharing arrangement. As the second largest party in South Africa after the 1994 elections, the NP had the widest appeal across minority groups. As such, it was suitably placed to take on the role of opposition and rigorously defend minority interests. Indeed, the evidence of 1994 suggests that the party was not electorally ill-fated because of its racist past. White voters who had, in the main, supported the NP's policy of racial segregation during the period of apartheid, continued to support the party post-apartheid. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the probing work of the TRC had a damaging impact on the party by unearthing troubling evidence of the state's violation of human rights. The GNU complicated the relationship between the participating parties and prevented the NP creating for itself an oppositional space in parliament. This worked to the advantage of the Democratic Party which decided to steer clear of consociationalism. At the level of theory, Lijphart inadequately addresses the possible electoral hazards of power sharing – especially for weaker coalition partners. Yet, the case of South Africa from 1994–1996, which Lijphart was very familiar with, illustrates the potential downsides of a power-sharing settlement for a participating party. Its example ought to be drawn upon to hone scholarly understanding of the possible negative effects of consociationalism. This article adds to the work of Spears, Cheeseman, Lemarchand and Lynch & Crawford on power sharing in Africa by accounting for the factors which constitute the drawbacks of power sharing. It discusses how a settlement can result in the electoral demise of one of its chief architects whilst not threatening the stability of the settlement itself. By peacebuilding standards in Africa, this has been an achievement. Indeed, it has been quite remarkable given the specific conditions of

South Africa – the bitterness of the country's racist history; its state and non-state racial violence; and its tightly structured patterns of racial segregation across the social and political spheres. These apartheid-related factors meant that there was no guarantee the country's transition from political violence to non-violence would be more successful than conflict resolution efforts elsewhere on the continent. Yet comparatively speaking, at least since 1994 to the present, the absence of inter-ethnic violence indicates that the country has been more successful than many of its African neighbours, although without the survival of a party that was indispensable to the engineering of the peace settlement.

NOTE

1. F.W. de Klerk speech 2.5.1994. <file:///D:/dsns5/Videos/940502_fwdk_speech_reaction_-to_the_1994_election_results.pdf>, accessed 29.6.2019.

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