Consociationalism in Northern Ireland

Power-sharing as Making or Breaking a National Identity?

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Abstract

The Northern Irish conflict known as the Troubles reached a peace process in 1998, through the framework of the Good Friday Agreement. Infused in the agreement are the traits of consociationalism, a theory often articulated by Professor Arend Lijphart. While Lijphart himself condemned a consociational democracy for Northern Ireland as unrealistic in its initial stages, the political settlement in the region is today one of the key confirming cases of consociational theory. However, while political cementation, enabled through this agreement, heightened the opportunities for the political accommodation of groups in a heterogeneous Northern Ireland, the traits of consociationalism offers less normative measures as to move beyond conflict management. The intent of this essay is to understand the barriers and opportunities of consociationalism in tangling the complexity of Northern Ireland as a deeply divided society. Moreover, this disciplined configurative case study will grant insights on whether the theoretical framework has offered sufficient explanatory power for Northern Ireland in making the shift from conflict management to conflict transformation (Taylor, 2011:8-10). Through the application of consociationalism and nationalism, the barriers and opportunities of the Good Friday Agreement in maintaining a Northern Irish identity will be discussed and analysed by theoretical and qualitative means.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Consociationalism, the Good Friday Agreement, Role of Membership, Nationalism & National Identity
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1 Introduction

*Only a national consciousness, crystallised around the notion of a common ancestry, language, and history, only the consciousness of belonging to ‘the same’ people makes subjects into citizens of a single political community – into members who can feel responsible for one another.*

The vast and violent conflict in Northern Ireland has made its mark in the political and societal sphere of the region. Between a majority desiring to remain part of the union with Great Britain, and a minority longing for a united Ireland, a peace process was established through the framework of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This particular conflict has often been made example of as to demonstrate what lack of unity between the concepts of state and nation may cause. Research in political science has on multiple occasions proved that the concepts of state and nation are difficult to align. This is visible when we may witness various ethnic and ethno-national minorities (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006b:255), which from several aspects find themselves on the wrong side of a border. Attempts have been made to force an overlap on nation and state, but history has showed us that various forms of non-democratic phenomena often accompany such attempts. Discrimination, exclusion and ethnic cleansing have been more or less present in cases where governmentally sponsored nationalism has been implemented (Anderson, 1998:127-128). The core of the debate regarding the political conflict in Northern Ireland has mainly concerned barriers towards a peace process and negotiation of such, as well as the shape of a more including political settlement (Wolff, 2011:11). The connection between the idea of the nation-state, consociationalist devolution and identity within these structures will in this essay be examined. The idea of *Britishness* will be challenged through a multinational and pluralistic context framed by the setting of Northern Ireland. With the intention of increased knowledge of construction and reconstruction of national identity, the particularities of Northern Irish politics and nationalism will help us explain the idea of the frameworks of identity in a consociational context.

1 Habermas, 1998:113
1.1 Problem Formulation

The end of the conflict in Northern Ireland is by the work of several authors associated with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement\(^2\), 10th of April 1998 (Wilford, 2001: preface). Through this agreement, the United Kingdom established devolved governance based on power-sharing. A regional coalition government, with a proportionally represented parliament generated through free and just elections, is an essential part of this arrangement. The structure is considered to have drawn inspiration from Lijphart’s consociationalist theory (Lijphart, 2008: 118).

Consociationalist theory has tended to focus and proclaim a power-sharing structure in deeply divided societies. Various forms have been implemented across cases as to ensure clarity in who it is that should decide. As conflict management in Northern Ireland concerns two states, this specific debate has also been shaped by the role and function of national identity, and to what extent power-sharing structures are able to ensure shared perception of such. The agreement has been a primary reference to the current and multifaceted view on national identity, which by many is considered to have been dealt with through power-sharing structures in this case (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006a:44-45). However, the First Minister of Northern Ireland, Mr Peter Robinson, stated in September 2014 to the BBC News that the devolved consociational arrangements of government at Stormont “are no longer fit for purpose” (BBC News Northern Ireland, 9\(^{th}\) of September 2014) and that such arrangements should be considered a short-term solution. This case study of Northern Ireland will therefore examine power-sharing, as to discuss its effect in the region. Specific interest will be placed upon the Role of Membership in the assembly, as initiated by the Agreement. A registration of membership is an obligatory feature in this consociationalist rule and its execution refers to all members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) designating an identity in defining himself or herself as nationalist, unionist or other (Article 6, Strand One, Good Friday Agreement). Such a parliamentary design may be questioned on the idea that it withholds the main ethno-national groupings prominent during the signing of the agreement, and therefore has no ability to consider potential changes in the Northern Irish society regarding identity affiliations and associations.

\(^2\) Henceforth referred to as the agreement
1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this essay is to examine the political structure of Northern Ireland anchored in the agreement, and through application of consociational and nationalistic theory understand and explain the casual relations of power-sharing on national identity building. Hence the research will land on a specific take on the role of assembly designations and its effect on the two major ethno-national blocks of nationalists and unionists. As a literary disciplined configurative case study, what is deemed desirable in terms of analysis are case generalisations. Moreover the study of the case does not wish to offer normative solutions, nor will the intent of the essay suffice in explaining how the situation has developed. What is desirable is to understand the explanatory features of the two theories in the context of Northern Ireland through existing research (George & Bennet, 2005:84).

1.3 Questions of Formulation

With regards to problem formulation and purpose, this essay will examine the case of Northern Ireland by reviewing the devolved consociational assembly structure within the frame of the following questions:

1. What are the conditions for, and barriers against the development of a national identity in Northern Ireland due to a proportionally represented assembly based on predefined ethnic affiliations?

2. To what extent has a cementation of predefined designation roles in the assembly in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement’s implementation of consociationalism contributed to the region’s ability to come together or hold together?

The two formulated questions will set the benchmark of focus for this research. The first question will bring about a discussion on parliamentary aspects of the agreement and its shortcomings regarding political ethnic accommodation. The second question will build on the devolved consociational assembly design and discuss case specific power-sharing as means of creating coexistence or unity. The questions concern a debate on autonomy, equality and identity in Northern Ireland’s power-sharing arrangement. An aspiration of this essay is to further a discussion of their functions.
1.4 Limitations

To fulfil the timeframe and size of this research according to instructions, it is essential that this essay be based on certain restrictions as to set the framework for the situational context. The essay will therefore investigate the moderating and polarising effects of consociationalism on the creation of a national identity in Northern Ireland from the signing of the agreement up until autumn of 2014. This will allow for conducted research to consume the agreement’s various implementations from a theoretical standpoint, and through the framework of consociationalism and nationalism offer complementary explanations on the attributes of its consociational structure. Specific emphasis will be placed on the role of parliament and its designation roles. Since the selected case ought to be considered a new consociational democracy, there are no underlying expectations or ambitions of examining action-patterns to be considered as regularities. Central units of analysis for this essay will be composed by the current political organisation in Northern Ireland through the agreement, where unionists and nationalists will constitute the two primary ethno-national groups. The two selected theories on nationalism will complement the consociational framework in terms of concept definitions and the composition of a plural society.
2 Method

This chapter will outline the choice of scientific method and research used for the case study. The structure of the case study will be discussed and the theoretical perspective of the essay motivated. Material, source criticism and challenges will demonstrate considerations taken concerning bias, authenticity and dependency as to enforce validity in the research process.

2.1 The Case Study

In accordance with a disciplined configurative case study, this essay will place focus upon one single case with the aid of existing theories on consociationalism and nationalism as to attempt to explain power-sharing in Northern Ireland and its potential effect on national identity. The theory-guided research has strived to be idiographic in the sense of interpreting a section of Northern Irish politics, and not generalise beyond the specific theoretical aspects (George & Bennet, 2005:75). In conducting an independent study of literature, the work will bring about a theoretical argument with the commitment of answering the two essay questions. The study of literature will manage both short and long term preconditions and barriers to the extent such are presented in the collection of data.

2.2 Theoretical Perspective

Power-sharing in Northern Ireland will be examined through consociational and nationalistic theories. The essence of the study will be to view the applications of consociational and nationalistic arrangements in their ability to explain the specified case (Esaiasson et al, 2012:100). The case study will examine consociationalism with the help of Lijphart’s collection of works, and this will suffice in coming to terms with the essential theoretical effects. The work of consociationalists McGarry and O’Leary has been greatly influenced by Lijphart’s theory, and could potentially offer a building block on the theory in the case of Northern Ireland. Furthermore, their critical consociationalist takes on the case will further the explanatory factors of their associated theory (George & Bennet, 2005:75). Nationalism will be applied to the
case through the conceptual rethinking outlined in Connor’s text *A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a...* With the use of Connor’s definitions, Hutchinson’s division of political and cultural nationalism will be used to argue the requirements in achieving a representative state (Hutchinson, 1994:122). The two theoretical perspectives will enable perception of Northern Irish consociationalism in a dual formation, and further a understanding of the idea of power-sharing in the region as organic or rational.

### 2.3 Material

The agreement will during this process be considered as a primary source. This agreement could arguably be considered to make up the framework of the current power-sharing setting and has, in its dual formation, been signed by eight political parties in Northern Ireland as well as by both of the governments in the United Kingdom and Ireland (Wilford, 2001:1-3). The primary source will be essential in the role as independent material as it has been distinguished from interpretation. Furthermore the agreement will act as a division between historical and contemporary politics in Northern Ireland. The study of literature will manage both short and long term preconditions and barriers to the extent such are presented in the collection of data. To ensure maintenance of an independent perspective during the research, no interviews or surveys will be included in this work.

Secondary sources will consist of previous research in the form of literature, and its interpretations and analysis of the primary source as well as discussions of consociationalist implementation relevant for the case. Consociational theory will be elaborated on by the means of Lijphart’s contribution in the field and McGarry & O’Leary’s case specific offerings. Complementary theoretical arguments will be brought up to illuminate the concepts of nation, state and ethnicity and how we are to understand such concepts from selected theories. In this particular section the theories of Connor and Hutchinson regarding concept definitions will be prominent (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994:36-46). This approach will be of great aid in coming to terms with the idea of national identity in Northern Ireland.

Previous interpretations of the agreement will be essential in understanding the current situation in Northern Ireland, and the intention is to use authors with interests in this particular place. The empirical chapters of this essay will use research of case
specific authors, with links to Northern Ireland, the UK and Ireland. Focus will land on the effects of the agreement with regards to various identity groupings. The critical take on the agreement in *Rethinking Northern Ireland* as edited by Miller will offer depth to this and Wilson & Stapleton’s work will enlighten the debate on identity politics in the UK.

### 2.4 Source Criticism

In terms of source material, this has not been an issue of scarcity. The literature has been focused on analogies and collections of work from academics and politicians with more or less strong associations to the Northern Irish conflict. The use of multiple analogies will allow for potential change in opinion or refinement of argument for several of the authors, including Lijphart, Hutchinson, McGarry, O’Leary and O’Dowd. While the use of Northern Irish affiliated authors highlight issues of potential bias, this standpoint will be valid. Use of the agreement as primary source material will display subjective attitudes amongst respective authors. Further, as to bring about theory consumption in the equation, the analysis is considered to become more transparent when opposing arguments are applied. As this work does not strive to offer an extensive historical description of events, selective historical bias is not deemed to have an effect on the research. The primary source will constitute the framework of power-sharing in this context, and interpretations of such are well considered and included on their academic merits and relevance to the case in terms of consociational affiliations and nationalist positions.

### 2.5 Challenges

This piece of research will rest on the selected theories and their respective concept definitions. For the research process, this has been a complicated matter to grasp, as there are obvious absences of concept explanations concerning meaning and application. Large parts of the literature tend to presume a rather extensive pre-understanding of relevant concepts. Coming to terms with validity of concepts has then required the inclusion of several pieces of work from the same author, and the ability to contrast the use of concepts between authors. Another accommodation of this challenge has been the choice of language in this essay. Due to the literature
selected for the study being primarily produced in English, the decision to follow this working method was deemed essential as to avoid loss of meaning in the process of translation. Certain boundaries have been drawn in the ability to incorporate power-sharing aspects, and the focus has been framed around proportionality, the most important feature of the consociational principle according to Lijphart. While obvious in terms of selection bias, this has allowed for specific theoretical application and questioning as well as a thorough investigation of assembly accommodation. Role of membership is a case specific formation and not a theoretical requirement of consociationalism. Hence it is expected that both theories will be essential in coming to terms with its implications (Lijphart, 2008:8). The analytical aspect of this research is enabled through theory application, and the material has been interpreted through the consumption of consociationalism and nationalism as to ensure validity. Furthermore the consideration and accommodation of challenges, limitations and selection bias in terms of material used has structured this piece of research and furthered its reliability.
3 Theoretical Framework

The use of developed theories will set the fundamental understanding of the case of Northern Ireland. As to come to terms with case relevant explanatory factors, this essay will draw its generalisations on the frameworks of Lijphart’s consociational theory, with the complementary case specific offerings by McGarry and O’Leary. The application of theory will make no attempts at refusal, but to identify the scope of theory on this particular case. The unique design of Northern Irish politics will utilise theory on nationalism as to complement the framework of power-sharing, which in the case study will involve two states. Building on perceptions of the case of Northern Ireland as bi-national, it will be argued that the degree of self-determination in this case is of great essence, hence the role of national identity will have to be developed by the assistance of nationalist theories (George & Bennet, 2005:112-113). Presented in this context, Connor’s explanation of nation and state and its shaping of nationalism, along with Hutchinson’s division of political and cultural nationalism will focus the theoretical framework of this essay, emphasising the adaptive and regenerating nature of identity politics (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994:131).

3.1 Consociational Theory

The Consociational theory developed by Lijphart is often considered as more than an analytical tool. Due to its application in deeply divided societies, it is more often described as a practical recommendation for such. In engineering consociationalism, the most important choice being made is that of defining the segments of a plural society as matters of self-determination or pre-determination. Lijphart offers his definition on the two concepts as the first allowing the democratic structure to incorporate societal groups with the opportunity to manifest themselves, whereas the latter would make use of previously identified groups in power-sharing (Lijphart, 2008:66). While the latter is noted to be the main feature in consociational design, the author argues for increased attention on the notion of self-determination. The complete conviction of Lijphart regarding the appropriateness of consociationalism in democracy for deeply divided societies is argued in the offered guidelines. The usage of power-sharing in multifaceted ways, and the continuous reinvention of the
framework is considered to create collective actors among groups emphasises and facilitates the solution of autonomy rather than sovereignty (Lijphart, 2008:66). Power-sharing in deeply divided societies are furthermore closely linked to the definition of pluralism offered by Lijphart. Understanding pluralism in society as “a multiplicity of interest groups that exerts pressure on the government in an uncoordinated and competitive manner” (Lijphart, 1999:16), greatly emphasises the need for consociationalism in this accord.

To explain the core idea of consociationalism, Lijphart make use of the concept as synonymous with power-sharing (Lijphart, 2008:6). Furthermore, with regards to concept definition, deeply divided societies and plural society are used interchangeably, denoting their purpose. The core feature of division is important to distinguish as to comprehend the author’s idea of plural societies as detached subsocieties, or segments. The use of ethnicity as to distinguish between subsocieties is in Lijphart’s theory the most common, and preferable as it overlaps and to some extent incorporates other subsocietal traits such as religion, language and ideology. The theoretical application of Lijphart’s consociational framework will then have to be associated to the general assumption of subsocieties as ethnic differences and ethnic minorities. Ethnic differences are in turn loosely defined as cultural differences (Lijphart, 2008:67).

In order for us to build on this theoretical framework, the four characteristics of consociationalism as laid out by Lijphart will be explained and investigated as to understand its relative role and function in this case. Notable in studies of consociational theory is the fact that this framework is neither specific nor set in stone. In its democratic application, we are to abide by the four principles, but the implemented design of which, may be interpreted in a variety of ways (Lijphart, 2008:67). While the first principle of grand coalition is considered typical, it goes under several identifying names. Lijphart notes its participatory trademarks and makes use of Dahrendorf’s definition of the idea as a cartel of elites (Lijphart, 2008:29). As a principle of executive power-sharing, grand coalition design may be in the form of more or less permanent councils, committees or cabinets with the shared feature of violating the principle of majority rule. The argument is presented as the decision making process in deeply divided societies with fragmented systems involves very high stakes, and should therefore require share of executive power
during periods of great crisis and political instability with hostile subcultures (Lijphart, 2008:30-31).

The second principle is that of autonomy, or self-government. In *Thinking about Democracy*, Lijphart outlines this principle as cultural autonomy, specifically referring to religious and linguistic groups and the importance of ensuring a certain amount of self-government concerning culture in particular. When arguing the relevance of above-mentioned kinds of autonomy, we note a division of application in three categories. Autonomy may take the form of federal arrangement, where state and linguistic boundaries correspond one another. Educational autonomy is a second application, defined as “the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer their own autonomous schools, fully supported by public funds” (Lijphart, 2008:46). The third application distinguished by Lijphart is “personal laws” (Lijphart, 2008:46), a form of legal separation for minorities, handling marriage, divorce, custody and adoption of children. This perception of the shape of autonomy or self-government is considered by the author to aid in matters of cultural concern, and discrimination of minority groups (Lijphart, 2008:48).

In explaining the third principle, Lijphart refers to proportionality as standard in political representation. In arguing for *proportional representation* in public institutions as well as proportion in terms of benefits of the allocation of public resources, the author is quite determined on this stance (Lijphart, 2008:16-17). Clearly stating that due to his conducted research, proportional representation is the best method to achieve democratic stability in all countries, not only ones dealing with deeply divided societies (Lijphart, 2008:17). Notes brought about by Coakley, building on the ideas of McGarry & O’Leary discusses proportional representation as incorporating the first principle of grand coalition in executive power, and that this has been overlooked in previous literature (Coakley, 2011:123). Lijphart do not elaborate on this considered overlap, instead he focuses the specifics of the third principle of consociationalism as “proportional representation with closed lists and election districts that are not too large” (Lijphart, 2008:9) as the ideal design for this.

*Minority veto-rights* constitute the fourth and final principle of Lijphart’s consociational theory. Primarily with the intention of negative minority power, the shape of the veto ought to be formulated as the ability for minorities to prevent decision-making that may have an effect on the autonomy of such a group (Lijphart, 2008:127). With regards to this, the minority veto may be of an absolute feature or far
more loosely and suspensive in its adaption. Furthermore the areas of application to
the decision making process varies, from all to only specific kinds (Lijphart,
2008:67). Used as an enabler of coexistence, the veto has tended to the design of an
informal agreement in power-sharing democracies in a majority of the implemented
cases. In the few exceptional cases, the veto has instead been formulated as a
constitutional feature (Lijphart, 2008:49).

In his article *Consociational Theory: Problems and Prospects. A Reply*, Lijphart
furthers his theory building on macro-level approaches. One of the barriers in
implementing power-sharing structures concerns the many areas subject of this
aggregation, as well the individual power holders. Democratic stability in this context
is greatly dependent on the case specific degree of pluralism, traditional decision
making procedures and the problem solving abilities within a nation (Lijphart,

We may distinguish between a horizontal and a vertical structure of
consociationalism, where the first is considered to enforce a stronger democratic
government and the latter is argued to produce far more neutral democratic
consequences. This perception by Lijphart is hardly surprising, due to horizontal
implementation as incorporating the four principles of power-sharing. With an over-
fixation on the notion of cultural autonomy, which constitutes more of a vertical
approach, consociationalism is by the author considered less able to manage negative
influences of tendencies associated with cultural disputes. This suggests that the first
two principles of Lijphart’s consociationalist theory are therefore important core
features and horizontal and vertical structures of the theory are not mutually exclusive
(Lijphart, 2008:274).

It is essential to note the normative features of this theoretical framework. This is
primarily due to consociationalist theory being not only empirical, but also
prescriptive theory in the sense that it offers recommendations for deeply divided
societies. This is in turn possible according to Lijphart, if the theory can be proven
valid through the course of action (Lijphart, 2008:269).

In establishing validity in the theory of consociationalism, Lijphart notes the
complexity of presenting hard evidence of the theory’s ability to produce democratic
stability. By drawing on O’Leary’s elaboration on this issue, Lijphart emphasises the
difficulty in operationalising and measuring of concepts such as democratic stability
and deeply divided societies. How do we go about determining stability, what ought
we consider to be the idea of survival for consociationalist democracies and how do we know if or when such democracies have failed (Lijphart, 2008:273)?

Criticism against Lijphart’s theoretical framework is highlighted through certain academic perspectives, stating consociationalism as a short-term solution. Where consociationalism is considered to cause polarisation rather than obtaining or maintaining democratic stability, the case has instead been made for power dividing, i.e. separation of powers. Lijphart argues the issue of interpretation, and how certain cases previously have been defined. By illustrating examples of Lebanon and Cyprus, he makes the theoretical case of consociationalism. In spite of both examples of consociationalism ending in civil wars, he credits the failure of the theoretical implementation not to the theory per se, rather to the idea of them flawed in the implemented design (Lijphart, 2008:275). Critical consociationalists McGarry & O’Leary builds partly on this issue by explaining consociational theory as overly focused on traditional ideas of sovereignty and the nation-state. The approach runs the risk of fixating too much on legislative and executive institutional design, which by consequence overlooks the importance of external actors. Due to deeply divided societies conflicting on perceptions of the idea of state and nation, the issue of consociationalist cases ought to be considered as bi-national or pluri-national, according to authors McGarry & O’Leary (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006b:249).

Consociational theory has been subject of much criticism concerning its lack of ability to provide a suitable setting for a development of new identities (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006b:250). The principle of grand coalition has suffered attacks concerning this matter, due to its obvious risk of operational barriers in terms of cooperation, cementation of elite positions in executive design and the difficulty in establishing it. Furthermore it excludes a democratic opposition, by some regarded as a stimulating feature of democratic decision-making (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006a:62). An exaggeration of focus on institutional and legislative design in forming a consociational democracy is argued to be a weakness. Maintenance of group divisions in institutions may indeed deepen divisions as opposed to creating unity, and the platform for alternative ethnic voices runs the risk of remaining weak (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006b:250). However, as claimed by McGarry & O’Leary, working within a consociational framework may very well improve political conduct and other more institutional disappointments (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006b:276).
Imminent importance of the role of *sectarianism*\(^3\) and its connection to consociational solutions concerns open criticism towards the theory as entrenching segregation along sectarian lines. Sectarianism is along with the understanding of *ethno-nationalism*\(^4\) often debated in terms of making up the fundamental base of conflict in deeply divided societies. However, it is important that the theoretical approach does not present prescribed consociational design based on correcting material and political inequality as an isolated problem, but with the considerations of nationalism and democratisation in mind throughout (McGarry & O’Leary, 2011:385-387).

The logic of consociationalism and its rational features as creating short-term effectiveness is an absolute conviction of Lijphart, as well as the fundamental idea of working within a nation-state. The validity of the argument of working with the sharing of power over any other framework is yet to stand the test of time in most cases, especially concerning the lack of distinction of societal divisions within consociational theory, be them ethnic, religious or ideological (Lijphart, 2008:279).

### 3.2 Nationalism

The study of nationalism is vast and interdisciplinary process. Works on the subject includes ideas of nation and nation-states, as well as ethnicity, identity and community. Issues concerning lack of ability to agree upon definition of above mentioned concepts is imprinting our ability to interpret the ideological framework and furthermore our understanding of nationalism and its contents. Hence the theoretical framework selected for this essay will initially clarify aspects of defining nationalism in political research. Building on definition, we will then explore the political and cultural dimensions of nationalistic theory (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994:3-4).

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\(^3\) Sectarianism defined as relating to religious or political sects and the differences between them. Hutchinson describes this as a shift from political conflict to an embedded cultural hostility (Hutchinson, 2005:100).

\(^4\) Ethno-nationalism as defining the nation around a shared ethnic group (Hutchinson, 2005:180-181)
3.2.1 Defining Nation, State, Ethnicity & Nationalism

Walker Connor places great emphasis on the danger of using the words state and nation as one of the same. In the initial stages of his chapter an explanation is offered concerning the pre-existing scholarly awareness regarding the idea of the state, and illustrates this through a territorial example. It is to Connor evident that the nation on the other hand, is a much more complex case of conceptual definition due to the intangible nature of the word (Connor, 1994:36).

In discussing group origin and how we may approach the issues surrounding a definition of the two concepts of state and nation, Connor outlines the fundamental idea of the nation as a subject of self-definition rather than an other-defined formed grouping. Important to distinguish for this research is the use of nation and ethnic groups. With the concept of ethnicity originating from Ethos, Greek for nation, Connor builds the case of the concept as referring to an affiliation of identity with one’s ethnic group as “characterised by common decent” (Connor, 1994:43). In Connor’s definition “a nation is a self-aware ethnic group” (Connor, 1994:45) with the obligation of being self-defined, whereas the core of an ethnic group may be defined by others.

By this we understand the nation as defined by attitudes, and for us to involve the sense of a common heritage we rely on an emotional perception of belonging to an extended family (Connor, 1994:37-38). The historical function of nation as designator of origin as well as blood ties has experienced a development of usage in its application, specifically as interchangeable with human categorisation concepts of citizenry and the people. The adaption of nation as synonymous with inhabitants of a country is problematic in the sense that comparisons between different kinds of citizenship is difficult to make, and the variety in peoples association of what constitutes their national identity is not accounted for when we equate human collectivities in a national sense (Connor, 1994:38). The adoption of the concept of nation-state illustrates the required distinction between state and nation. Where the state is considered to comprise a political unit with territorial features, we view it as an extension of the nation. The concept of the nation-state therefore outlines the coinciding of a national grouping within a state. Connor questions the uncritical labelling of all states as nation-states, as occurrences of such are a deviant feature in reality. The confusion and misuse of the concept has particular impact on minorities,
and ultimately on the notion of nationalism (Connor, 1994:39-40). Misuse in assumptions of nationalism tends to link the phenomena to the state, and Connor illustrates this by examples of nationalism as a form of nation building, a concept commonly and improperly used as to describe the building of states. He emphasizes that since states in his opinion more often than not contains far more than one nation, this idea of nationalistic loyalty is wrongfully defined. (Connor, 1994:40-43)

### 3.2.2 Cultural & Political Nationalism

With the issues concerning an understanding and usage of the concepts of state and nation, and specifically their role in the confusion of interpreting nationalism in mind, there are further issues of merging concepts to be noted concerning nationalistic theory. John Hutchinson argues in his text *Cultural Nationalism & Moral Regeneration* for two distinct sets of nationalism. The two types of nationalism, political and cultural nationalism, differ in several aspects as will be outlined below (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994:122).

In terms of ideal, political nationalism strives under the guidance of reason as to form unity through common laws and customs, by the means of educated citizens. The idea of commonness implies the surpassing of cultural differences, and identity making in this context would then have to be re-defined or re-imagined, with little room for historical identity creation. The rationality that entrenches political nationalism in the desire of shaping political unity through a representative state is then fundamentally a modernist feature. Human consolidation with legal structures and legislative power through the rationality features, which constitutes modernity, is in this nationalistic standpoint able to form political communities, or states capable of participating in a wider rationalist civilization (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994:122-123).

Cultural nationalism is presenting a rather different case and contrasting perceptions of the state and nation. While viewing the nation in terms of a unique formation around shared cultural, territorial and traditional traits, the framework is more centred on the ideas of individuality, rather than conformity as political nationalism. With the perception of the nation as organic, the cultural nationalistic definition of the state is in the words of Hutchinson ‘an accidental’, which is deemed compatible with the acknowledged differentiation of individuals (Hutchinson, 1994:122). The nation is then not an adaptable component of civilization, but rather a
mobile order, a subject of continuous development and regeneration as to serve its current individualistic content (Hutchinson 1994:123). Further, it is established by Hutchinson that cultural nationalism perceives social development as imprinted by conflict. Engaging around the uniqueness of national culture while discarding foreign practice, the aim is to celebrate and identify the differentiation from other communities (Hutchinson, 1994:124).

“Only out of struggle is the nation, always prone to decay, regenerated” (Hutchinson, 1994:129). With conflict by no means requiring hostility towards set frames of a nation, the theoretical standpoint of cultural nationalists instead refers to a reaction against a continuous modernisation within a societal setting. Considering reform as primarily an internal function within groups, a meta-level approach towards embracing and developing the uniqueness of identity through reformation of national heritage will generate an active community on a larger scale. Hence as opposed to introducing external norms. The environment of the nation is emphasised as the appropriate setting for avoidance of assimilation while enabling progress in all people. The political movement of cultural nationalism and its theory discards notions of community development as universal. It is through adaptation we will be able to achieve divergent cultural uniqueness, by which contribution to a wider setting will be possible (Hutchinson, 1994:130-131).

3.3 Theory Application

It is with the help of outlines theoretical frameworks this conducted research will be able to manage empirical evidence and reach the potential of understanding the main effects of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Although the theoretical application may occur individually, there is a submerging strive of viewing them as complementary in terms of explanatory ability. While Lijphart’s consociational package will work well in comprehending the traits of the power-sharing arrangements in terms of the primary source, an attempt will be made as to further the findings of the agreement. In doing so, the potential shortcomings of political nationalism will be applied and in turn justify an in-depth analysis on its implications on Northern Irish national identity. This application will refer specifically to the problematic and arguably simplified concept definitions made by Lijphart in terms of ethnic groupings and the use of subcultures. Connor and Hutchinson present thought
provoking theories which in difference with Lijphart’s consociationalist theory, tend not to focus on the formation of state institutions and its functions to the same extent. Connor and Hutchinson will justify a discussion on power-sharing in Northern Ireland as consisting of *pre-defined political groupings* based on *self-aware ethnic groups*. Such a discussion will enlighten our understanding of the two main ethno-national groups in the region as natural consequences or subjects of social construct in entrenched sectarianism (Taylor, 2011:322).

### 3.4 Summary

The definition of consociationalism as power-sharing is relative and varies in design across cases. This has motivated this specific case study as to come to terms with its traits and function in Northern Ireland. For the purpose of theory consumption the term will be used synonymously to *power-sharing*. Lijphart’s four principles will be applied and discussed as to enable analysis of its explanatory factors, with specific emphasis on proportionality and coalition formation. The question of the Northern Irish conflict as *bi-national* is evident in all literature consumed for the purpose of this study, and justifies an understanding and a potential rethinking on the ideas of the *nation* and *state* as to comprehend power-sharing implications in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Furthermore the weaknesses of Lijphart’s division of subcultures will lead on to a discussion of the case as containing *competing nationalisms*. The consociational aim of *accommodation* will bring about a discussion on the structural ability in balancing group autonomy and equality in this case. In considering the two main ethno-national group formations in the agreement as nations, a clear analysis of their barriers and opportunities within a devolved consociational structure will be possible.
4 Northern Ireland: Power-sharing & the Good Friday Agreement

Local politics in Northern Ireland has a long experienced focus on self-determination and the role of boarders. Since its partition from Ireland during the period of 1920-25, the politics of the region has been imprinted by the acts of a unionist majority and a nationalist minority. Attempts to alter this setting have to a large extent enforced a vast and violent conflict, which post 1968, is referred to as the Troubles (O’Dowd, 2011:295).

4.1 Background

The shared consensus over the agreement in 1998 offered a chance of reconciliation through the means of power-sharing. Prior to the agreement, approximating a period between 1972-1998, Northern Ireland was subject of direct rule by the British House of Commons, due to the regions judged incapability of appropriate governance (Barton & Roche, 2009:12). Considered as conservative tactics, the efforts made by Westminster as to moderate the conflict where argued to benefit the IRA campaign. Furthermore, with the degrading of Stormont, the implications for a segregated Belfast and perception of sectarian territoriality did run the risk of further polarisation by neglecting the Irish dimension (Barton & Roche, 2009:18). When multi-party talks emerged in 1996, the debate mainly concerned the decommissioning of arms by the IRA. The largest party at the time, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) refused talks with Sinn Féin – “the political wing of the IRA”, due to this matter (BBC History, The Good Friday Agreement). Mr Tony Blair’s entrance in the talks would change this, and in 1997 the demand of decommissioning was removed, followed by an IRA ceasefire. With the UUP and United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) reinstalled in

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5 “The Irish Republican Army was founded in 1922, immediately after partition, to fight for an independent Ireland. It is the main republican paramilitary group from which most others originated, including the provisional, real and continuity IRA, and the Irish National Liberation Army” (Northern Ireland: The Troubles, BBC History). The IRA is defined as “the major quantitative protagonist in the conflict, responsible for 49 % of all deaths between 1966 and 2001” by McGarry & O’Leary (2006b:259).
the talks, two referendums took place in 1998. In Northern Ireland, a referendum was held on ratification of the agreement. Simultaneously, the Republic of Ireland held a vote on constitutional change, which removed the Irish constitutional claim over Northern Ireland’s six counties. Both referendums resulted in a yes, and the agreement was reached and realised. However, the devolved consociational transition was not smooth. Unionists still opposed the lack of decommissioning by the IRA, and Northern Ireland’s new assembly suffered through several suspensions and a return to direct rule in 2002. During this time, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) outgrew UUP as the largest unionist party and took the lead in the opposition of Sinn Féin. After almost a decade of peace negotiation, the IRA applied to the decommission demand and simultaneously opened up the possibility of post 2007 elections to grant Northern Ireland its devolved powers through a coalition government (BBC History, The Good Friday Agreement). With Mr Ian Paisley of the DUP as First Minister and Mr Martin McGuinness of the Sinn Féin as Deputy Prime Minister, Northern Ireland in 2007 had an assembly of political extremes. Furthermore, with the executive comprised by the two most obstinate forms of unionist and nationalist parties, an impossible political collaboration turned out to be a realistic alignment (Barton & Roche, 2009:256-269).

4.2 The Good Friday Agreement

Its parts have proclaimed the requirements of the agreement as a new beginning. With a proposed solution of a devolved structure of power, the traits of Lijphart’s consociationalist criterions were specified in the plans for Northern Ireland’s fresh start and to tangle the evident legacy of suffering concerning the region. The negotiated agreement stated plans for a Northern Irish assembly and cross community executive power-sharing. This included proportionality rules in governmental and public sectors (Declaration of Support, The Good Friday Agreement, 1998). The notion of autonomy was incorporated through community self-government and minority veto rights were also established (The Good Friday Agreement, Article 5:ii)

Regarding the agreement as a major achievement, O’Leary notes the key implications of the agreement in that it required a referendum, and as result a form of “co-sovereignty in the arrangements agreed between its patron-states” (O’Leary, 2001:49). With the establishment of a single chamber assembly and an executive, the
region of Northern Ireland is, through the agreement, in control of legislative and executive power concerning several political sectors, such as education, health and social services, finance and economic development, agriculture and environment (O’Leary, 2001:50).

Upon being elected to the assembly, members of parliament have to choose a designation of nationalist, unionist or ‘other’. With a design of majority rule in the assembly, members of parliament are able to pass “normal laws within their competences” (O’Leary, 2001:51). However, special majority is also a feature, which may be triggered when passing specific legislation requiring support across communities, such as budget concerns. Such a special majority requests support by a minimum of 30 MLAs out of 130. In implementing ‘parallel consent’, this form of voting is endorsed to ensure synchronised support amongst nationalists and unionist, and requires majority support in both groups, as well as a majority of the assembly as a whole. ‘Weighted majority’ on the other hand requires 60% of MLA support in the assembly to pass motions, and 40% of designated unionist and nationalists respectively (O’Leary, 2001:51). In terms of the executive power-sharing, the agreement established a sharing between nationalists and unionist regarding the two highest positions of the executive; First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Differing in only the title, the two positions share equal symbolic power in functions of representation and are elected through nationalist and unionist assembly majority respectively. This key role is further stressed in the agreement in ceasing of held office; if one of the two ends their role as office holder, the other must do so as well (O’Leary, 2001:52). The formation of executive deviates slightly from Lijphart’s normative suggestions concerning grand coalition, specifically referring to the Northern Irish coalition design as voluntary, as indicated by the application of the d’Hondt rule⁶ (O’Leary, 2001:53).

The Northern Irish Assembly elections use of the single transferable vote (STV) directly opposes Lijphart’s proclamation of party-lists in proportional representation.

⁶ In Northern Ireland, “a potential cross-community coalition is, in effect, built into the constitutional accord, preventing the exclusion of any major party that wishes inclusion (and is prepared to commit to peaceful and democratic politics) from being denied access to office” (O’Leary, Grofman & Elklit, 2005:199). With regards to the d’Hondt rule, parties are free in their right to nominate ministers based on their number of seats allocated in the Assembly, hence no vote of confidence is required. Matters of specific proportionality were altered in 1999 post a crisis concerning executive formation, which introduced a rule of “a well-formed executive” as consisting of a minimum of three designated unionists and nationalists respectively (O’Leary, 2001:53).
O’Leary does not share Lijphart’s advocating, and maintains that the STV is no more sensitive to gerrymandering than Lijphart’s normative suggestion and that a high threshold in exchange for higher levels of proportionality is to be considered effective in coming to terms with fragmentation (O’Leary, 2001:57n).

4.2.1 Evaluating Aspects of the Good Friday Agreement

Cleary stated in the agreement is the recognition made by both the UK and Irish governments on the right to freely exercise self-determination of the entire island of Ireland, to hold both Irish and British citizenship and to further the creation of a united Ireland, if a majority of Northern Irish citizens would desire so (The Good Friday Agreement, Article 1.1-1.6). But when we discuss the politics of citizenship, it is important to note the identity traits embedded within the concept, and pend on the ability of a British citizenship to include British, Irish and other cultural identities. Here O’Dowd builds on Connor’s definition of the nation as self-defined (Connor, 1994:45), which in turn provokes questions of above-mentioned citizenship. The extent of which British citizenship of the British state is able to maintain perceptions of self-defined nationhood of ethno-national unionist and nationalist groupings remains unclear, despite O’Dowd’s take on the British state as multi-national (O’Dowd, 1998:78-79)

Strand one of the agreement outlines the Pledge of Office, which differs vastly from monarchical features, as allegiance to the crown is excluded (the Good Friday Agreement, Pledge of Office, Strand One). McGarry & O’Leary emphasises this particular point as displaying the bi-nationalism imprinted through the implementation of the agreement. Banal nationalistic traits in the use of symbols for public purposes are further noted, and mutual respect emphasised in their application. In detail this could be argued as making a case for mutual recognition of political identity (the Good Friday Agreement, Article 5: Rights, Safeguard and Equality of Opportunity, Strand Two) and an overall definition of subjects of the agreement as “national communities rather than ethnic or religious communities” (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006a:57-58).

The implementation of devolution governments throughout the United Kingdom could in time increase further demands for greater autonomy, as we have experienced through the implementation of the Scottish referendum of 2014. Also, Colley notes
the potential changes in Westminster parliament, as it in its current state when compared to Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament comes across as being primarily an English Parliament. Maintenance of this arrangement may fuel resentment, and Colley emphasises a federal arrangement to manage these issues, where an English Parliament or Assembly would allow Westminster to act as a setting for cross-border decision-making (Colley, 2014:152-153). This issue is not elaborated on by Lijphart, who in turn focuses the case on the conviction of success in terms of the application of a deviating form of UK standard parliamentary design of majoritarianism. Setting the Northern Irish conflict on a consociational course has enabled government coalition in Northern Ireland (Lijphart, 2008:118). Lijphart complements this recognition as a feature of power-sharing arrangements, and states that parliaments implementing ethnic inclusiveness in this form will be able to, by the means of compromise, reach “peaceful coexistence” (Lijphart, 2008:168).

Although the stamp of consociational approval in terms of assembly structure and designation could ramify or polarise political commonness in terms of distributing potential privilege to the distinguished designation categories of unionism and nationalism. Albeit the allowance of MLAs to vote and partake in the assembly with or against their designations, it is still problematic with the general alignment of all other political groupings as ‘other’. This perhaps out-dated designation design could be considered as demonstrating a lack of ability in creating opportunity for new political identities, and by its extension, in adopting such. McGarry & O’Leary notes the scarcity of new or reformed political identities and the discouragements in furthering them:

There is an incentive for voters to choose nationalists or unionists, as members from these groups will, ceteris paribus, count more than ‘others’ or be more pivotal. The rules have the effect of pre-determining, in advance of election results, that nationalists and unionists are to be better protected than ‘others’. The ‘others’, if they were to become a majority, would be pivotal in the passage of all normal legislation, but nationalists and unionists would have more pivotality in any key decision requiring cross-community support.⁷

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⁷ McGarry & O’Leary, 2006b:272
Hence a combination of the weighted majority feature and designation roles does privilege the two political identities. While various consociationalists may argue for the Northern Irish assembly as operating in terms of proportional representation, it is evident that the role of national identity affiliations has an effect on governance. In so, the agreement may be viewed as an internal reformation of a traditional status order, but the debate on whether it is enough to reach regional consolidation through primarily legal structures remains problematic. When applying nationalism in the analysis, it is evident that the agreement is compatible with traits of political nationalism with its focus on legislation and institutional reform, as to create unity around the re-shaping and re-presented accountability for devolved consociational governance. An overly focused institutional approach is bound to have effect on the divisions associated to Northern Ireland. Highlighted in Hutchinson’s theory is the author’s consideration regarding the issues arising when we debate the effectiveness of a nation as equated to political modernisation and not with its function on identity (Hutchinson, 2005:171).

What the continuous dividing of identity groups in accordance with the agreement then indicates is that the two singled out groups do have inherited political power. This power is in turn furthered by the cultural heritage of groups and the legacy of a sectarian environment in their disputed territorial location. In sum, the apparent political immobility in the shape of cemented political groups does construct a barrier. The lack of incentives for the ‘other’ as a result continues to reproduce the same political divisions prominent during the conflict. Hence the commonness of the Northern Irish is difficult to distinguish in terms of assembly function, and it is obvious that the institutional features of the agreement does not suffice in coming to terms with the composition of the Northern Irish citizen.
4.3 Accommodating Northern Irish Identities

By definition, Northern Ireland as a separate entity was a construction built around an antagonistic relationship between two ethno-national blocs and a politics which privileged zero-sum territorialism.\(^8\)

In implementing consociational devolution as a distinction between what is perceived as regional and national structures of a state, it is not apparent what constitutes Northern Irish identity, as well as how perceptions of such may be linked to an understanding of Britishness. Furthermore there is an existing uncertainty regarding the role of consociationalist devolution in accommodating minority identities in the setting of Northern Ireland (Wilson & Stapleton, 2006:11).

As a charged concept, the idea of Britishness in Northern Ireland provokes political associations towards unionist approach, and in extension certain protestant social and cultural dimensions. The notion of Britishness being maintained through the British union is problematic, as its meaning and implications does not equate with identity perceptions in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland or England. For the case of Northern Ireland, this identity label is further opposing ideals for a minority of its population, namely Northern Irish nationalists. Wilson & Stapleton discusses the potential issues of a British identity due to the concepts lack of ability to incorporate ethno-national identity features in their remark. The outline is that Britishness in the context of Northern Ireland has been centred around the state, not the nation. By this, Wilson & Stapleton argues that the concept does not consider ideas of ethnicity or culture in its definition. By extension, this has resulted in a negative perception of the concept by self-defined excluded identity groups, mainly amongst Irish and nationalists, as they deviate from the political composition of the normative British citizen. While the ideas of what it means to be British in Northern Ireland has differed greatly, the problem has mainly been an overly focused approach as to what is not. Improvements may then be possible by a shift of said focus as to what it is or what it may become (Wilson & Stapleton, 2006:12). It is not valid to elaborate on the future of nationalists and unionists as ethno-national groups. What we can concur from this case study, and what has been imprinted on the Northern Irish conflict for an extensive period, is the problematic accommodation of competing nationalisms. The

\(^8\) O’Dowd, 2011:297
unionist and nationalist groupings stands out in the agreement. While they, along with the ‘others’ have been placed as participatory representatives in the decision-making process, Lijphart’s second key element of group autonomy in power-sharing furthers a lack of national unity.

The central emphasis of the Good Friday Agreement was to include and accommodate both nationalisms in a single political dispensation. There was no attempt to create a ‘third way’ or new entity based on either nationalism. Nor was a national integration programme agreed. Instead, both nationalisms were deemed legitimate. The intention was to create a single political entity that could accommodate both identities, giving both access to power and managing their interaction through consociational institutions.9

What MacGinty & Darby pinpoints here, is the apparent clash between the decision-making and group autonomy aspects outlined in the agreement. The use of predefined identity groups has resulted in the use of two polar opposites, and in this extension, two competing nationalisms are illustrated. The cementation of the two groups have, besides the barriers previously discussed, enforced a block on unity creation in the agreement. What has been created in the agreement is room for two nationalist groups to coexist within the frames of the state. With Connor’s definition in mind, we note a great barrier in Northern Irish nation building in that of unionists and nationalists respectively regards themselves as nations – they are self-aware ethnic groups. The sustainability of maintaining at least two nations within the state is problematic, and does arguably not contribute to the region’s ability to hold together.

The consociational accommodation of this matter furthers opinions on the agreement as based on simplicity without sustainability. Lijphart has previously approved the idea of “good social fences may make good political neighbours” (Lijphart, 1969:219), which rather harshly could summon up the group autonomy aspect of the agreement. In his early work, Lijphart has argued for the separation of subcultures. While not defining the concept of subcultures, we note the resemblance of its application in his updated work in terms of subsocieties. The separation of which is presented by the author as effective means of consociationalism. Not necessarily referring to a territorial separation, the argument is made for subcultures with “divergent outlooks and interests” (Lijphart, 2008:219) to interact through grand

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9 MacGinty & Darby, 2002:166
coalition on a national level via respective elite groups. It is fundamentally understood as a method of creating coexistence of subcultures without conflict, as “conflict arises only when they are in contact with each” (Lijphart, 2008:219). This position makes up a rather drastic complement to Connor’s suggestions in maintaining nations within a state, and in turn poses questions on whether or not improved and extended forms of contact on inter-communal levels increase divisions or furthers understanding in plural societies.

Hutchinson does not elaborate on issues of separation. However, he expresses concerns in that while ethnicity is very much compatible with pluralism, it is a form of constrained pluralism (2005:12). In the case of Northern Ireland, this is evident in the apparent lack of change in political affiliation and by its extension, an unwillingness to mix socially. The argument of sectarian divisions remains, but is enforced by the fact that there are more peace-walls in Belfast today\(^{10}\), than during the signing of the agreement (Wilson, 2010:165). Elaborating on Hutchinson’s argument of constraints, we can understand the managing pluralism in a consociational context as offering alternatives, which may be more or less renewable and interchangeable. But it may just the same “produce a polarisation of options” (Hutchinson, 2005:112).

It is evident that the agreement’s aim of inclusiveness did enable a peace process by handling the two ethno-national groups on an equal basis. However, the lack of a ‘third way’ has had its consequences. The idea of the agreement as initiating a new beginning did result in a legitimisation of both nationalisms; unionists and nationalist alike are able to hold on to their ideological standpoints and cultural heritages. In extension allowing a continuation of disputing the nation, the state and associated symbols. All by rational means and justifications.

\(^{10}\) Important to note is that the additions to the interface barriers were decided by the British government and not the Northern Irish executive (McGarry & O’Leary, 2011:369)
4.4 Rethinking Northern Irish Power-sharing

Far from the ideal, the agreement’s implication on the case of Northern Ireland is considered a failure both in terms of nation building and state building, and importantly from both an Irish nationalist and a British nationalist perspective. British nationalism in Northern Ireland gains strength from its state sponsorship and has been made possible through the protestant majority in the region and its ability to draw on traditions of the British Empire. The fundamentals of Irish nationalism differ in several aspects, creating severe contrasts on the perceptions of identity. Irish nationalism in Northern Ireland has established itself as an anti-state movement, and in its extension as anti-sectarian. The strive for identity traits of Irishness as replacing other cultural and religious identity affiliations has greatly influenced the failed attempts in achieving control of the island of Ireland as a whole (Anderson, 1998:128).

The consociational reimagining of Northern Irish nationalism by the words of McGarry & O’Leary further proclaims more emphasis on the issues surrounding sovereignty and self-determination. Illustrating the sheer weakness of consociational theory when applied to the case of Northern Ireland, McGarry & O’Leary argues the lack of sufficiency and consideration brought about from traditional consociational arrangements, specifically referring to a continuous contestation of boarders. Competing nationalisms in Northern Ireland have tended to be dealt with in a traditional sense of power-sharing, and with a distinct internal focus. The theoretical implementation of consociationalism in this contested case partly been brought about through previous discussions by Lijphart. He isolates the main issue towards a settlement as general unwillingness amongst the unionist population regarding power-sharing, as they with a Westminster majoritarian system would be able to exercise power alone. McGarry & O’Leary contests the validity in this analysis as it ignored the unwillingness of Irish nationalists to work within an internal power-sharing framework as well. Hence they find the capacity of explanation weak. Instead it is argued that due to consociationalism’s internal focus, it is not well equipped in terms of conflict management concerning two states or more (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006a:54-56).

The relationship between the state and the nation cannot be over-stressed in this research. The formation of national identity has generally been proved to predate that of the state, the power held by the state seldom creates the nation. The expectations of
the agreement have therefore been difficult to break in, as the balance between equality and group autonomy must be considered further (Hutchinson, 2005:193).

While debatable, the purpose of a consociational framework developed for Northern Ireland as conflict moderator has created a new context for minority groups. The discussion on what constitutes a British citizen within this framework appears to occur mainly through political discourse. The furthering of the debate on cultural identity in relation to the state and one’s citizenship has through power-sharing arrangements enabled the formal recognition and respect of groups, ethnic and religious. A consociational political structure in Northern Ireland, along with devolution, has focused ideas of identity by institutional means. The change in the political discourse in terms of nation, state, ethnicity and citizenship continues to produce categories of membership, and the fluidity between them. The articulation of available political identities has been important in the formal recognition of minority groups, and does reproduce the peculiarities of cultural identity and citizenship. This is essential to the extent of an understanding that while political identities may appear antagonistic, cultural identity affiliations need not be (Hutchinson, 1994:129-131).

It is evident that the agreement has furthered the political equality of groups, particularly that of nationalists has been deemed as a broader political accommodation by several authors. In maintaining a status quo, the agreement has endorsed independent traditions to continue. This endorsement has had an effect on the political structure in parliament, as we have seen a transformation amongst parties in their ability to work together as to form grand coalition. The role of Sinn Féin is subject to further examination, but the reality of the party holding the Deputy First Minster role and co-governing with the DUP is a merit of the agreement (MacGinty & Darby, 2002:166).

However, the political unifying aspect in the case of Northern Ireland is not to be deemed reached in this assessment. The agreement has enforced what appears to be a current form of coexistence. But there is an underlying desire regarding the consociational questioning of designation roles amongst researchers, to grant Northern Irish politicians "the freedom to choose identities outside communalist straitjackets” (Wilson, 2010:197). This is important in the sense of abolishing the current political promotion of “rival identities” (MacGinty & Darby, 2002:174), which is apparent within the current structure. Present power-sharing in Northern
Ireland has in this research been described as benefiting two particular groups, and others have argued the outline of this as essential in enforcing mutual respect and collaboration amongst the two. The two ethno-national groupings are deemed as fundamentally antagonistic, in that their respective visions of nationhood as framing a state have not experienced an ideological change since the initiated agreement. Applying the two groups to the divisions made by Hutchinson, we can distinguish their cultural nationalisms clearly. The cultural aspect proves that their ideas of a nation are far more than a geographical location and that ethno-nationalisms can be as timeless as they decide to be. In drawing upon the uniqueness of a group, its shared heritage and name, our two ethno-nationalisms may have adapted to the structures of the agreement, but maintained their individualistic components. Affirming, “there can be no final definition of a national identity” (Hutchinson, 2005:111).

A political structure promoting coalition and mutual respect by the agreement’s institutional demands did in this case not result in an end of the conflict, rather a constructed frame of collaboration in shared hegemony. Enforced collaboration through the agreement, and the balance of group autonomy and political equality appears to have been weighted. There are obvious imbalances to be accounted for in this peace process, with gains and losses for both ethno-national groups. Power-sharing in Northern Ireland has required the transferring of power between actors, and such a drastic political transformation has demanded cessions and opportunities for all involved.
5 Conclusion

The effects of power-sharing structures in Northern Ireland are deeply affected by the polarised society it frames. Fundamentally, the outcomes of the Good Friday Agreement and its accompanied peace process have been unsuccessful in terms of resolving the core dispute between the two ethno-national groupings. The ideological struggle of a contested homeland has instead been transformed in the sense of managing it, through more peaceful means and formats.

What the research questions along with the general sentiment of this work testifies to, is a rather institutionalised view of the conflict management. Elaborating on the conditions for the development of a national identity in Northern Ireland, the role of membership plays a functional role rather than liberal. Important to note is that the designation feature has been more or less essential in establishing a functional Assembly, it has ensured security of primarily our ethno-nationalist groups and moderated their internal anxiety. It is furthermore evident that the role of membership has been functional in electing First Minister and Deputy First Minister premierships for the very same reason; ensuring equal accommodation of the two groups. While the subjected groups were self-defined at the instalment of membership designations, they were pre-determined in that they were chosen through elite cartel and applied in their legal cementation. Role of membership contains clear barriers towards unity making in the maintenance of group formations prominent during violent conflict and due to the lack of alternative formations arising from this specific political structure. Problematic is that the usage of designation roles does not appear to further renewal within or amongst groups. However, the absence of structuring a ‘third way’ or enforced ideas of nationhood does arguably contribute to the furthering of the uniqueness of current groups, a function which may display increased democratic application in the future in the form of active and included communities. This would concur with Hutchinson’s assessment of reform as an internal function within groups, stressing the adaptive nature of cultural nationalism. However, what has been deemed problematic is the utilising of political and cultural nationalism as a tool in comprehending the exercise of power and identity making. This is due to the latter tool presenting an issue arena itself. By extension it has been problematic to define concepts exhibiting themselves under constant change from a political standpoint.
The use of pre-defined groupings is here seen as reflecting the lack of trust amongst Northern Irish ethno-nationalisms. This assessment is made in that while Northern Irish consociationalism applies to a horizontal structure as it incorporates Lijphart’s four principles, a lack of opposition and quiet alternative ethnic voices have not stimulated the political discourse. The decision to remove the majoritarian system in Northern Ireland’s legislative Assembly and grant nationalists place in government along with unionists has been one way of coming to terms with inequality in the region. Proportionality and grand coalition have been used as means to resolve historical injustices. With historical events in mind, this research has shed further light on the maintenance of the uniqueness of groups. A Consociational and institutional approach to identities is by Lijphart defined as accommodating, which in this context does function as to include the desires of ethno-national groupings in not being viewed as undifferentiated inhabitants of a state.

The second research question furthers the discussion on accommodation, and does evidently display a lack of compatibility with the concept of integration in the consociational structure. Designation roles and the obligatory MLA affiliation of such in combination with the ability of the people of Northern Ireland to define themselves as British and Irish presents a rethinking on what comprises the citizen.

The Good Friday Agreement exhibits clear evidence of accommodative traits, as opposed to integration in the sense that it does not proclaim one unified national identity. Instead there is an underlying desire through Lijphart’s principles to endorse pluralist identities, which can be of individual or overarching nature. Rather than to turn “subjects into citizens of a single political community” (Habermas, 1998:113), consociationalism in Northern Ireland and devolution in the UK increasingly emphasizes a political system based on recognition. Several of the authors presented in this piece of work notes a danger in the formation of politics anchored in mutual respect, equality and recognition in the context of Northern Ireland. The agreement’s reimbursement of inequalities through recognition could be argued to generate further demands for the autonomy of groups, which by extension could pose as problematic in socio-economic aspects. This is due to group autonomy as requiring equality of opportunity, which is not ensured through recognition of differences.

It has been argued that the consociational attempt to rebalance the scale of equality could bring about a sense of supremacy amongst the two ethno-national groupings, at the expense of the resentment of the ‘other’ category. Maintenance of group divisions
in institutions may indeed deepen divisions as opposed to coming together by unifying means. However, designation roles along with grand coalition making have created incentives for Sinn Féin to comply with more conventional politics. Hence McGarry and O’Leary’s belief in working within a consociational framework as to improve political conduct appears to have made its mark.

Summarising the question of the Good Friday Agreement as an aid in furthering or obstructing a national identity, it has become clear that this form of identity is not synonymous with allegiance to the state of the United Kingdom. The pluralistic setting of Northern Ireland rather proclaims dual, and in some cases multiple identifications, seen from a consociational viewpoint. This in turn would encourage a reformulation of the second research question in future research, bringing about a discussion on the desirability of the ‘peoples’ in Northern Ireland of coming together as a political unit or holding together by means of coexistence.

Suggestions for future research would then present formation around ethno-national political discourse and the affiliation and desires of its peoples. The banality of nationalism and its symbols will require further in-depth analysis as to ensure a valid analysis of the cultural identity of nationalists and unionists in their polarised context. The Good Friday Agreement has enabled conflict management through the use of mutual respect for pre-determined ethnic groups. But its ability to balance the scale of group autonomy and equality requires further investigation as to determine the sustainability of consociationalism in the region. What the consociationalist devolution in Northern Ireland continues to display is that while ethno-nationalisms may not yet trust each other, faith in the process remains.
6 References

Connor, Walker (1994) A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a…


