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ETHNIC CONFLICT AND DICHOTOMOUS POLITICS

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND WIN-WIN DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES

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Abstract

The international community is dominated by the western powers, all of which appear to be obsessed with the notion that democracy must be based on a majority vote. This implies that (almost) every political question is a dichotomy, a two-option choice between two supposedly exclusive opposites. Hence, in ethno-religious disputes throughout the world, international diplomats often advocate the wrong medicine, the exercise of the right of self-determination by means of a *closed* question, a two-option, win-or-lose, no compromise, referendum. In some instances, indeed, the democratic process itself is a cause of war.

Instead of being the win-or-lose means by which one faction in society may dominate the rest, the democratic process should be a win-win procedure by which society as a whole comes to an accommodation, i.e., a verbal or votal consensus. As in conflict resolution work, the appropriate voting procedure is based on *open* questions, and the appropriate voting procedure is a multi-option ballot, by which is identified the option with the highest average preference... and an average, by definition, involves everybody. Now *that* is democratic.

About the Author

Like Jean-Charles de Borda, Peter Emerson was first a naval officer. Then, after four years as a volunteer science/maths teacher in Kenya, he moved to Belfast in 1975, not least because of his parentage: his father was an Irish Protestant from Cork, his mother an English Catholic from Cheshire. He now works as the director of the de Borda Institute, a small but international NGO which specialises in promoting preference voting, especially in plebiscites on sovereignty. He speaks Russian, some Serbo-Croat and some Kiswahili, and his work abroad has centred on conflict zones in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and last year in East Africa. His most recent work is *Defining Democracy.*

Unusual Abbreviations

MBC	modified Borda count
QBS	quota Borda system
SLA	Sudan's Liberation Army
SPLA	Sudanese People's Liberation Army

1

YET ANOTHER DISASTER

In February 2003, the SLA started its armed rebellion in Darfur, and since then, the Janjaweed has created "the world's worst humanitarian crisis." But what prompted these events?

Six months earlier, in July 2002, western diplomats facilitated the parties to the conflict in South Sudan - the SPLA and the Khartoum Government - to sign the Machakos Protocol. This stated that in six years' time, an as yet undefined area - undefined, that is, in terms of its northern border - would be entitled to exercise the right of self-determination. In other words, the people(s) of the southern 'half' would hold a referendum on secession.

Was it right to bring this so-called right, and in particular the commonly held belief-cum-practice that this right should be exercised by a majority vote, to a continent of such multiple human diversity? Is it right that a people may determine itself on the basis of only a majority of itself? And is it right that the 'international community' should continue to advocate a majoritarian interpretation of democracy?

INTRODUCTION

In conflict resolution work, professional facilitators use *open* questions. Whether the conflict is between two estranged partners or between two or more ethno-religious groups, mediators tend to follow a fairly standard methodology. They first establish what options exist by asking *open* questions; next, in a process which is sometimes called shuttle diplomacy, they identify which option, albeit with amendments and modifications, is the highest average preference for all concerned; and finally, they bring the parties to the conflict together for a handshake and a peace agreement.

In politics, however, we invariably use *closed* questions. It is "Yes-or-no?" "For-or-against?" "Are you with me or against me?"[1] The question is either, "Do you want option *A*, yes-or-no?" or "Option *A* or option *B*?" Now in many instances, the logic of asking such a closed question means that the exercise is pretty meaningless. Recently, lots of Greek Cypriots said a very loud "No" to the proposed UN-sponsored peace agreement. In effect, a decision-making process was used by which a decision could not be taken, and an opinion poll was conducted by which no-one has ascertained anybody's opinion. Before the events in Cyprus, a lot of Gibraltarians said "No," to thus create another stalemate. And the process originated in Northern Ireland where, for many years, unionists used the slogan, 'Ulster says "No"'.[2]

At the very least, it would be wiser to follow the German principle of the 'constructive vote of no confidence'. By this it is implied that the voter is not allowed to just say 'no'; they have to say 'yes' to something.[3] This means the democratic process is a little more open. Ideally, of course, democracy should allow for as much openness as possible - it's called pluralism - and in Guam, to quote the best example of this practice so far, they held a 6/7-option referendum on their constitutional status. The ballot paper contained six specific constitutional arrangements but, just in case someone(s) else had another idea, there was a seventh blank option where voters could suggest and then vote for their own constitutional proposal.[4]

In this article, then, we will outline what might be the basis of an *open* democratic structure, with the obvious implication that the corresponding voting procedures would be more inclusive, more accurate and more democratic. Indeed, it could be argued that such a structure would help, not only to resolve violent conflicts, but to prevent them from erupting into violence in the first place.

We must first take a look at the weaknesses of our present majoritarian structures, however, and we'll start by looking at three particular conflicts of recent years - Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland - with especial emphasis on the negative effects of international diplomacy, especially those which emanate from the almost universal (or western) obsession with the majority vote.

RWANDA

In 1892, on a piece of land just outside to-day's Entebbe, the Battle of Mengo was fought. African Catholics went to war with African Protestants. Now surely no-one, to-day, would say that that bloody nonsense was not prompted by a European mindset. Sadly, the genocide in Rwanda was another disaster in large part prompted by a European mindset.

The story started in the 1930s when, despite the fact that all the people spoke the same language and shared the same land, the colonial authorities issued every citizen with an ID card, and everyone was classified into either Hutu or Tutsi. Anyone who had inter-married, anyone of another grouping such as the Twa, anyone who was post-tribal, were all denied their right to their own identity, and all were 'forced' by the *closed* question - "Are you Hutu or Tutsi?" - to take sides. The question was based on height: the short were called Hutu, the tall were classified as Tutsi, and anyone who was somewhere in the middle was asked another closed question: "Do you have ten or more cows?" "No" meant Hutu, "yes" Tutsi. And all this was done to maintain a system of minority rule for the ultimate minority, the Europeans.

In the 1950s, the winds of change were blowing and we changed our minds. We now promoted *majority* rule. Which is still either/or, of course. Thus the losers of yesterday could be the winners of to-morrow. In Northern Ireland, we have been killing each other for years, decades! In Rwanda, in contrast, the first recorded sectarian murder was in 1959. Then, when the *Interahamwe* initiated their murderous genocide, they used the slogan *"Rubanda nyamwinshi"*, a Kinyarwanda expression which means "the majority people".[5]

It is, as I say, a European mindset. It was not just a failure of western diplomacy. Diplomacy was a cause!

Before we leave Rwanda, I want to say a quick word about their traditional decision-making process. It is known as the *gacaca*, a Kinyarwanda word meaning 'grass'. Basically, whenever the village wanted to make a decision or resolve a dispute, the elders would gather on the grass and discuss the matter, until they found a consensus. It is estimated that, during the genocide, murders were committed by about 100,000 people. The ringleaders of this highly organised massacre are being tried in the UN court in Arusha in Tanzania, but the foot soldiers are facing the court of justice and the bereaved of their victims, in lots of *gacacas*, in every village in the land. It is a highly commendable attempt to overcome the legacy of the genocide,[6] and it is interesting to note that while the Rwandan Government has indeed established a department to look after reconciliation, there is no such ministerial office in Northern Ireland!

YUGOSLAVIA

In 1991, as the Balkans descended into chaos, the European Union appointed a constitutional lawyer, Robert Badinter, to head a Commission which was required to recommend ways to restore peace to those troubled lands. There was already open warfare in Croatia, Bosnia was in a terribly delicate situation, and Kosovo[7] too was not quiet.

This Commission recommended that every people, which wished to exercise its right to self-determination, should hold a referendum. As a result, what had been a disease - there had already been a few polls in the region - became an epidemic! There had been or were now two-option ballots in Slovenia (1990, 89% in favour from a 94% turnout), Croatia (1991, 93% of 84%), Macedonia (1991, 95% of 72%), Montenegro (75% of 52%)[8] and Bosnia (1992, 99% of 63%), all of which were recognised. Other votes in *Krajina* (1990, 99% of 95%), *Republika Srpska* (1991, 98% of 85%, with a few other polls in '91, '92, '93 and '94, invariably with similar results), *Herzeg-Bosna* (2000) and Kosova (1991, 99% of 87%) were not recognised. And yet further ballots in '91 and '92 in Sandžak were of uncertain status.

The result of these polls is best summed up by the words of *Oslobodjenje,* Sarajevo's now legendary newspaper. It said, "all the wars in the former Yugoslavia started with a referendum".[9] Indeed, in Bosnia, the barricades went up on the day of the vote! Now that journalistic comment was written in February, 1999. One month later, the international community repeated the mistake. They negotiated an accord in Rambouillet, by which Kosovo was to be allowed a referendum on independence in three years' time.[10] Milošević refused to sign. Nato bombed. Chernomyrdin re-negotiated the accords and removed the referendum clause. Milošević then did sign. So the bombing stopped. The whole thing had been yet another failure of diplomacy.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The closed question which underlies the conflict in Northern Ireland is well-known to all. "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" "Are you British or Irish?" Without any metamorphosis, this question has now been written into the Belfast Agreement,[11] and according to that treaty, the people of Northern Ireland will have a referendum, every seven years or so, until at last there is a majority in favour of a united Ireland. Quebec has had two votes so far, and some Quebeçois are now planning a third. The process is not so much a referendum, more a 'never-end-'em'![12]

The Agreement is an amazing piece of gobbledegook. It talks of "the principle of consent", a word which is usually meant to mean the agreement of both or all parties. Then, however, instead of referring to "the will of the people", it talks of "the will of [only] a majority", and please note the use of the indefinite article. The term '*the* majority' usually means the unionists. So the Agreement is not thinking that the unionists may one day change their minds, make peace, and join a united Ireland; oh no, there is still much antagonism, and the Agreement is anticipating the day when, due to demographic changes, the Catholics will outnumber the Protestants. It is no longer the force of arms, thank God. But it is still a question of force; it is now the force of numbers.

Hence the ridiculous situation whereby, in order to effect this principle of *consent*, they employ a measure of *dissent*, the two-option majority vote. Is it any wonder that the unionists are now on the back foot, 'defending' their right to march, their right to demonstrate, and even their own right to self-determination?

A further aspect of the Belfast Agreement, similar in some respects to details of the Dayton Agreement, is the consociational arrangements advocated for use in the Assembly. This too stems from the fact that many politicians think that all political questions are, and have to be, dichotomous. Whenever politicians decide that the simple majority vote is inadequate, as it obviously is in places like Northern Ireland and Bosnia, they resort to a variation on the theme, and never to a theme change. If it's not going to be a simple majority vote, they devise a weighted, qualified, twin or consociational majority vote.[13] But the majoritarian theme remains constant. In politics, it seems, the question is always dichotomous.

In a word, very few doubts are ever expressed to the notion that democracy means the rule of the majority. In Rwanda, however, there are some positive signs: it has been suggested, for example, that no one party should have more than 50% of the seats in parliament; secondly, there is a proposal for an alternative advisory chamber, in which each party, regardless of size, will have equal representation, and this second chamber will examine all proposals which affect inter ethnic-relations.

MAJORITARIANISM

Sadly, the western world is obsessed with the majority vote. There are two mistakes here. Firstly, we have long since decided that if the democratic process cannot lead to a verbal consensus, that if they cannot come to an accommodation which (it is hoped) represents "the will of the people", that then they should take a vote, a majority vote, which means the matter should be 'resolved' by opting for "the will of a majority". In short, if they can identify "the will of the people", fine; if not, they just settle for "the will of the majority".

The former verbal process involves a bit of give and take, and eventually all concerned settle for what was not necessarily their 1st preference. The latter, votal procedure sometimes involves no give and take at all, and it implies that the majority gains its 1st preference, in other words, that it wins everything, while the minority loses everything... (with the only safeguard for any minorities lying in human rights provisions. Sadly, these rarely apply to what for many concerns the biggest right of all, the right of self-determination.)

The second mistake is seldom considered, not least because it is, or at least it sounds, paradoxical, but it is this: you cannot identify the will of a majority by a majority vote. It is mathematically, logically, impossible. You can *confirm* the will of the majority by this methodology, perhaps. But, as I say, you cannot *identify* a majority opinion in this way.

Allow me an example to explain. Most political questions are *not* dichotomous. There are invariably umpteen ways a new development might be planned. As we all know, there are numerous possible systems of governance, as each democracy seems to devise its own. And there are, needless to say, countless ways budgets may be allocated, and so forth. If, then, someone asks a dichotomous question, they have probably asked the question in the wrong sort of way. We don't use closed questions in our domestic relationships - "Shall we go to Bangor for our holidays dear, yes or no?" As already noted, we don't use closed questions in conflict mediation. Well, we shouldn't use them in politics either.

But that is what happened. Mrs Thatcher wanted poll tax. The debate was actually multi-optional: there were poll tax (Tory), property tax (Labour), local income tax (Lib-Dem), land tax (Green) and the *status quo*, five options in all. But she wanted poll tax. She therefore asked the closed question, "Poll tax, yes or no?" or rather "Do you want poll tax or the *status quo*?" and she won majority support. A short time later, Mr Major asked a different closed question: "Council tax, yes or no?" and he too won majority support, from the very same MPs of the very same parliament! So neither of those votes identified the will of parliament; neither of them identified even the will of the majority; both identified the will of only the author!

In that situation, of course, the PM has the added advantage of the party whip, which means the vote is even more meaningless! So what happens in other majority votes? Well, take the Welsh referendum. Mr Blair said the Welsh should vote on whether they wanted devolution, *D*, or the status quo, *S*. Plaid Cymru wanted independence, *I*, to be on the ballot paper as well. But Mr Blair said no, it's either/or, it's *D* or *S*. They voted. 51% said *D*, 49% *S*. But we know some people wanted *I*. Doubtless, a few of these voted for *D*, because *D* was their second best, their second preference. Doubtless too, another few voted for *S* in the hope that *D* would lose, leading to a second referendum in which *I* might at last feature. And doubtless too a third few abstained.

So what does that result actually tell us? Basically, not a lot. It does not tell us the Welsh wanted devolution, (although maybe they did - we just don't *know*, that's all); it tells us only that Tony Blair wanted the Welsh to want devolution. And this is not just because of the narrow margin of victory.

In the referendum on Kosova we mentioned, 99% voted for the independence option. If that question had been "Unity with Albania?" doubtless there would still have been a majority in favour.

The conclusion is pretty stark: in most instances, a majority vote identifies only the will of the author. Which perhaps explains why this methodology has been used, in reverse chronological order, by such notable persons as Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Duvalier, Pinochet, Khomeini, Milošević, Tudjman, Mugabe, Hussein and Musharaff. In all these instances, the vote identified the will of only the author, and this is true, even in the two instances where the dictator lost the ballot.[14]

In many instances, then, a majority vote means next to nothing. And in practice, it is often a means by which those in power seek to pursue their own, sometimes sectarian agenda.

SELF-DETERMINATION

Now let us consider another illogicality. The right of self-determination implies that every people (whatever that is) has the right to determine itself. Interestingly enough, constitutional lawyers and others sometimes argue about what constitutes 'a people'; few, however, debate the methodology, and most assume a people may determine itself on the basis of only a majority of itself.

If, therefore, a big country wishes to be so, it may hold a majority vote. And if a majority of the people so wish, that big country may exist, regardless of the wishes of the minority. If, however, the minority are concentrated in one corner, they may also exercise their right to self-determination. And if a majority of the minority so wish, they can secede and set up a middle country, regardless of the wishes of the minority of the minority. If, however, the minority of the minority is concentrated in one corner, they may also exercise their right to self-determination. And, if a majority of the minority of the minority so wish, they may set up their own tiny country, that or opt out of opting out and opt back in again.

The formula is a nonsense. It will only bring peace, harmony and apple pie when there are no more minorities left, i.e., when every individual has exercised his/her right to self-determination and declared themselves to be an independent nation-state of only one person!

The big country was the UK; the middle country Ireland; and the tiny 'country' Northern Ireland. In the one big country of Yugoslavia, there were three middle countries, Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia; the first tiny 'country' was the *Krajina*, Bosnia had both *Republika Srpska* and *Herzeg-Bosna*, while Serbia has Kosovo and Vojvodina, and maybe too the Sandžak.[15]

To suggest this formula, a majoritarian right of self-determination, should now be the basis for internal conflicts in Africa is mad! It is, as I suggested above, an exacerbating factor in the conflict in Darfur. Can we even begin to imagine the consequences if this same principle is applied to Congo? Would the international community feel this 'right' could help matters in Rwanda?[16]

A BETTER METHODOLOGY - A DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy is for everybody. In theory, therefore, it should be a means by which all concerned come to an accommodation, a verbal or votal consensus.

Sometimes, of course, there will be unanimity. In which case, everyone gets their 1st preference. On other occasions, differences will be apparent, and the democratic process must allow for a bit of give and take, until eventually all come to a consensus. In this case, maybe only some get their 1st preference. Finally, on really contentious issues, where heated discussions fail to lead to an agreement, people may just have to settle for the best possible compromise. In which case, maybe no-one gets their 1st preference!

In some circumstances, therefore, using a decision-making process in which people can only express a 1st preference, may actually be undemocratic. (If, that is, by the word 'democracy', we mean a process which caters for everybody. Some people think the term applies to any procedure which involves a ballot as opposed to a bullet. Which, admittedly, is sometimes a huge step-forward.) When there is unanimity, it does not matter which voting procedure is used; you will always get the same answer; and in this instance, "the will of the people" is, of course, the same as "the will of the majority". When everyone eventually comes to a consensus, the choice of voting procedure may be crucial for, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself point out,[17] "the general will" or common consensus is not always the same as "the will of the majority". Lastly, when everyone settles for the best possible compromise, the outcome is almost definitely not the same as "the will of the majority".

For a voting procedure to be truly democratic, it must allow the individual participant - be he/she a member of parliament or an individual citizen - to express his/her preferences, whenever the debate is multi-optional... which is (nearly) always.[18]   Furthermore, as we shall see in a moment, the counting procedure should take all preferences cast into account.

DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

At the moment, there are a number of anomalies in the way we conduct our lives. The democratic process should be the means by which everyone in society chooses that option which they feel is best for society as a whole. Sadly, in present practice, voters often go to the polls with only their own selfish interests in mind. (This is largely because, in a majoritarian milieu, politicians often exploit these selfish interests of greed or, at worst, fear. Indeed, in some instances, as we have seen, a democratic vote itself provokes violence.)

The democratic process should be the means by which everyone comes to an accommodation. If, at the end of the debate, the outcome is to be based on that option which is everyone's highest average preference, it will not matter if, during the course of the debate, participants reveal their preferences. (In a majoritarian milieu, in contrast, negotiators reveal only their 1st preference, and keep the rest of their cards close to their chests. Which is one of the reasons why those sorts of discussions drag on and on, sometimes long into the night.)

The democratic process should be a means by which we all live together, work together, and take discussions together. We live with each other. We debate issues with each other. And then we should vote, *with* each other. Not ('for' and) 'against' each other, but *with* everybody. If, say, there are five options on the ballot, then I should give your option at least my last preference, not only to say that I acknowledge its validity, but also to say that if indeed the general consensus is in favour of your option, that then I too will accept that result.

The democratic process should itself be 'peace-ful'. I may state what *I* want, but I should also state my 2nd (and subsequent) preference(s), i.e., my compromise option(s). In fact, ideally, the process should allow the individual voter to, as it were, undergo an act of reconciliation. I may state what *I* want, but I should also be able to 'cross the sectarian divide' and express some support for some of the other options of my former opponents. (A two-option referendum, in contrast, is often little more than a sectarian headcount. Indeed, in many instances, it is not even that, for the minority does not even participate and sometimes actively boycotts.[19])

Ideally, therefore, as far as decision-making is concerned, the democratic process should be the means by which society can come to its best collective compromise. If everyone expresses their compromise options, it should be possible to identify the collective compromise.

THE VOTING PROCEDURE

There are, of course, many forms of multi-option voting, and quite a few forms of preference voting. Briefly, they are as follows.

- In plurality voting, the voter expresses only his 1st preference.

- In two-round voting, some of the voters may also express a 2nd or subsequent preference, if as a result of the first round, their 1st preference choice has been eliminated.

- In the alternative (or single transferable) vote, the voter must express only a 1st preference for the vote to be valid, but he/she may express other preferences if they so wish. In the count, however, only some of the 2nd and subsequent preferences cast may be taken into account. The procedure can be capricious.

- The Borda count is a preference voting system by which is identified the option with the highest average preference. In other words, it is a points system in which the winning outcome is the option with the highest number of points. In a 4-option ballot, a 1st preference gets 4 points, a 2nd preference 3 points, etc. Accordingly, the voter should express a full range of preferences. And in the count, all preferences cast by all are taken into account.

- The modified Borda count allows those who wish to submit a partial vote, but it nevertheless encourages them all to submit a full ballot. In an n-option ballot, she who votes for all n options exercises n points for her 1st preference, $n-1$ points for her 2nd preference, etc. But he who votes for only m options, gives his 1st preference only m points, etc.. Again, all preferences cast by all influence the outcome.

- A Condorcet count is like a league system, for it considers all the options in turn in pairs, and the outcome is the option which wins the most pairings. Again the voter should submit a full ballot. And, again like a Borda count, a Condorcet count takes all preferences cast into account.

Of the methodologies mentioned above, all but the Borda count and the modified Borda count are majoritarian, i.e., the outcome *may* represent "the greater good of the greater number", but not necessarily the collective best compromise. A Borda count, in contrast, identifies that option which is the highest average preference, and an average, by definition, involves everybody! Which is what a democracy is meant to do. So let us examine this methodology in a little more detail.

THE MODIFIED BORDA COUNT

In the debate, all must be allowed to participate, to the full. Each party, therefore, should be entitled to propose a motion. If, for example, the UN Security Council is debating the topic of Iraq, any member nation or group of member nations may put a draft resolution "on the table". If Bush and Blair want to suggest something, they may do so. If Chirac, Schröder and Putin want something else, they can propose an alternative. And if other countries have their own ideas, Syria perhaps and Cameroun, they may also draft a motion.

No matter where the location or what the institution, be it the UN Security Council or a national parliament, there should always be a team of independent, non-voting 'consensors' whose task will be three-fold. Initially, they collate all the motions submitted, compositing if necessary, to produce a distinct list of options for debate. Next, as the debate proceeds, as questions are asked, amendments proposed, new ideas formulated and so on, they update and maintain this list, if need be with a summary displayed on a computer screen.

If the debate proceeds in a really constructive atmosphere, if some are able to persuade others of their points of view and so forth, it may mean that the final list of options boils down to a single draft proposition; in which case, it may be assumed that this represents the common

consensus. If, however, at the end of the day, there are still a number of options on the table, if in other words there is still disagreement, then the chair may ask all to proceed to the vote. Let us imagine a situation in which, for their third task, the consensors draw up a final list of five options, options *A, B, C, D* and *E.*

With five options, a 1st preference gets 5 points, a 2nd preference 4 points, and so on. Now in theory, if everyone gives option *D*, say, their 1st preference, then *D* will get an average preference score of 1. Likewise, if everyone gives option *A* their last preference, then *A* will get an average preference score of 5. And again, if everyone gives option *B* a 3rd preference, or if some give it a 2nd and an equal number give it a 4th preference, then *B* will get an average preference score of 3.

The chances of all five options all finishing with the exact same mean score of 3 are just about zilch. Something is bound to be above the mean, and something else below. Something is bound to be more popular, or at least less unpopular, than the rest.

So, in practice, if the winning option gets an average preference score of between 1 and 1.5, it may be said to represent an (almost) unanimous position. If it gains a score of about 2, then that could be said to be the collective consensus or the votal consensus. And if the winning score is about 2.5, then that may be called the best possible compromise. (If the outcome is less than, say, 2.7, then obviously nearly all the options are roughly the same, and maybe it would be wiser to treat that vote as just a straw poll and to resume the debate.)

ELECTIONS

The same democratic principles as apply to decision-making may also be used in an electoral system.   Again, the democratic process should allow for the individual act of reconciliation, and the voter should be enabled, if he/she so wishes, to vote not only for one person of one ethno-religious grouping, but also for those of his erstwhile enemy factions. The procedure should therefore be preferential.

For obvious reasons, the electoral system should also be proportional. Indeed, it could hardly fall into a win-win category if it was not a form of PR. There are very few electoral systems which are both proportional and preferential.

- The PR-list system used in Switzerland and Luxembourg allows the voter to express more than one preference,[20] but he/she may club them together and may not necessarily 'cross the divide'.

- The confessional system used in Lebanon allows, and encourages, the voter to express more than one preference, but the system is a series of first-past-the-post elections, each one based on a different confession, and thus the system itself perpetuates the sectarian nature of Lebanese politics

- In Northern Ireland, PR-STV allows the voter to vote for both a Catholic and a Protestant, although it does not always encourage them so to do. Sadly, in the count, the vote may be used for the Catholic *or* it may be transferred, literally - and hence the name, of course, STV, single *transferable* vote - to a Protestant.

- The Quota Borda System (QBS) is similar to PR-STV in that it encourages each party to nominate only that number of candidates (plus 1 perhaps) which it thinks it can get elected. The QBS is based on an MBC, and it therefore encourages the voter to submit a full list, i.e., to cross the gender/party/sectarian divide! Secondly, in the count, all preferences cast by all voters are taken into account.

On balance, maybe the most inclusive electoral system would be a QBS election in six-seater constituencies, with a regional or national top-up based on an MBC of the voters first three party preferences and a threshold of less than 5%.

GOVERNANCE

In the first part of this paper, it was said that majority voting is often a bit of a nonsense. So too, it is now suggested, is the concept of a majority government. Parliament represents all the people (or it should, in theory, and it would in practice, if the electoral system was a good one); by the same democratic token, government should represent the entire parliament. Before describing how this can be done, let us just pause to consider what might happen if, after an election, no one party receives an absolute majority of the seats in parliament and if, instead, each of four parties - *W, X, Y* and *Z* - receive 39%, 29% 19% and 13% of the seats. In this case, a majority coalition could consist of either *W + X* or *W + Y* or *W + Z* or *X + Y + Z*. So yet again, majority voting is pretty meaningless.

The problem, then, is this: how best can a parliament elect a broad-based, all-party, power-sharing, coalition government of national unity (to use an amalgam of all the terms currently in the lexicon). Most elections apply to persons of equal status: local councillors, members of parliament, or whatever. When electing persons of a different status - a chairperson, a treasurer and so forth - it is normally done on a one-by-one basis. If and when power-sharing is involved, as for example in Lebanon, different appointments are done on a laid-down confessional basis.

Ideally, however, we should have an electoral system by which all MPs may choose, in their order of preference, both those whom they wish to be in government and the ministerial post in which they wish each nominee to serve. The methodology is known as the matrix vote, it is based on a QBS election (which in turn is based on an MBC).

If a government is to consist of six ministers - a PM, a deputy, and four ministers of *A, B, C* and *D* - the corresponding ballot paper would look like this.

PORTFOLIO	PREFERENCES					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
PM						
Deputy PM						
Minister of *A*						
Minister of *B*						
Minister of *C*						
Minister of *D*						

To complete a ballot paper, each MP would select six names, in his/her order of preference; next, he would allocate a ministerial portfolio for each nominee; and then he would complete the ballot paper, with one name in each column and one name in each row.

The outcome, the collective consensus of parliament, is bound to be proportional. Furthermore, it must be stressed that this voting procedure can be used, without any resort to party or sectarian labels or 'designations', to take the term used in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. Lastly, it would put an end to the whole system of political patronage, which has done so much damage to so many countries, not least Zimbabwe!

CONCLUSION

The above methodologies could work, if taken as a package. It would be inadequate, I suggest, to have a power-sharing executive if it still worked on the basis of an (albeit consociational) majority vote. At the same time, a power-sharing executive would not work very well if it had been elected via an unfair electoral system leading to a disproportionate balance in its parliament.

The first thing to do, therefore, is to bury the myth that a majority vote is, ergo, democratic. The second task, of immediate importance, is to stress that all ethno-religious disputes must be resolved on the basis of a verbal or votal consensus. If Sudan is to change, then (to quote the phrase used during the Northern Ireland peace process) "nothing should be agreed until everything is agreed". If South Sudan is to even contemplate secession, then consideration should also be given to what should happen in Darfur, and in East Sudan; maybe, too, consideration should be given to any knock-on effects there might be in Uganda. Similarly, in Congo and the Great Lakes, one could easily say, in hindsight, that it would have been quite unwise to treat any one problem, like the genocide in Rwanda, for example, in isolation.

Happily, to-day, Rwanda is not only confronting its own internal problems, it is also contributing to the AU peace force in Darfur. Maybe the Rwandans, via their *gacacas* and their non-majoritarian approach to politics, have something to teach us in Northern Ireland and Yugoslavia.

Footnotes

1   George Bush's now famous, or infamous, expression, used shortly after the terrorist attacks of Sept 2001. Interestingly enough, the phrase was also used by some communist leaders, and it first appeared in the Bible, St Luke, Ch 9 v 50 and Ch 11 v 23.

2   The 'Ulster says "no"' campaign started after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. Interestingly enough, the British government was prepared to discuss the possibility of joint authority with the Spanish, but such a constitutional arrangement is not possible for Northern Ireland, apparently. See below, fn 11.

3   This approach is used in the German Bundestag whenever the opposition wishes to propose a vote of no confidence in the government; in other words, they must already be able to propose an alternative government. In 1986, when so many unionists were parading the streets of Northern Ireland in their "no" campaign, the author stood with five colleagues outside Belfast City Hall with a banner which read "WE'VE GOT TO SAY 'YES' TO SOMETHING".

4   In the first round, just 1% took advantage of this blank option.

5   *The Rwanda Crisis* by Gérard Prunier.

6   A conference was held in Kigali last year, to discuss the *gacacas*. It started with the results of a survey conducted by a European company and funded by a western donor. When he had finished his presentation, a member of the audience pointed out that, "Asking 'yes-or-no' questions is very unAfrican." But very European.

7   The word is sometimes spelt Kosova.

8   Montenegro is now intending to hold another referendum, in 2005.

9   *Op cit*, 7.2.1999.

10   One could ask what is the point in asking a question when they already knew what the answer is, not least because of the 1991 referendum when 99% of the Albanian speakers voted in favour while the Kosovar Serbs abstained.

11   The Belfast Agreement allows every individual to have either a British or an Irish passport or both. Individually, therefore, we are allowed a compromise. But collectively, no. Northern Ireland is to be *either* in the United Kingdom *or* in a united Ireland. There is to be no compromise.

12   This phrase was first used by some wit on BBC Radio 4.

13   Weighted majority voting was first used in 1179, for the election of a pope. Qualified majority voting, by which large countries have more votes than do smaller ones, is used in the EU. Twin majority voting is used, for example, in Switzerland, when in a referendum, an option must obtain a majority of votes and a majority of cantons in order to be adopted. Consociational voting is used in plural societies like Belgium or Northern Ireland. It requires two (or more) separate votes from two (or more) communities or their representatives, and a proposal will be adopted if both (or all) give it majority support. In effect, it gives each group a veto.

14   Pinochet lost his second referendum, and became the first dictator ever to lose power democratically. Mugabe lost his referendum as well, but he had taken the 'wise' step of making sure it was non-binding.

15   A similar tale took place in the big country of the USSR, when Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia received their independence, only to lead to break-away revolts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Trans-Dnestr, and a triplet of Abhazia, Adjaria and South Ossetia.

16   The British Government is reported to have given the Rwandan Parliament a wonderful piece of new technology. The House of Commons is still, it seems, under-developed and not yet ready for such an innovation but, apparently, Kigali would benefit enormously if its members of parliament were able to take decisions by an electronic form of majority voting!

17   *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* by William Doyle, OUP, 1990, p 53.

18   The only country ever to hold a referendum on what would appear to be a two-option question - "Which side of the road shall we drive on?" - had three options on the ballot paper. What's more, 1.6% of the electorate voted for this third blank option. Maybe they felt we shouldn't drive at all!

19   In the 1973 border poll in Northern Ireland, the Catholics abstained. In the 1991 referendum in Croatia, the Orthodox abstained. In the referendum in *Krajina*, the Catholics abstained. In Bosnia, the Orthodox abstained. In Serbia, the Albanians abstained. And only in Macedonia did the Serbs and Albanians come together, when both groups abstained, united.

20   In the Swiss PR system, all the voters' preferences have identical value.