

**Consequences of Consociationalism: Elitism and Secular Alienation in
Lebanon**

Major Research Paper

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Political
Science

POL 7979

School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa

April 2018

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Introduction

Since independence in 1943, Lebanon has experienced a major civil war, as well as sporadic phases of political violence, resulting in long-lasting instability. The country has faced sectarianism dating back to the Ottoman Empire period throughout the nineteenth century. Sectarian sentiments can be traced back to the eighteenth century as Christian populations were notably turning to Europeans for religious empowerment at the time (Ussama Makdisi, 1996, p. 23). However, sectarianism intensified once France relinquished colonial power in 1943 and imposed a power-sharing system, distributing power amongst three major religious factions, Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and Maronite Christians. By 1975, Lebanon witnessed a civil war, political assassinations, a war with Israel and continual corruption, leaving a long-lasting scar on the country. What was once-upon-a-time called “Switzerland of the Middle East”, before the 1975 Civil War, has since become a country crippled by historic violence and corruption. According to Tom Najem (2012), weak institutions, consociationalism and sectarian tension fueled by external countries, resulted in the civil war (p. 32). Consociationalism is also partly to blame for other misfortunes that Lebanon has experienced such as political assassinations, suppression of rights and corruption. Although a direct causal relationship is not evident, consociationalism has fostered a favorable environment for this political turbulence.

According to the Freedom House (2017), Lebanon is currently considered “partly free”. Although a consociational model preserves proportional representation amongst

the various religious sects in Lebanon, individuals who distance themselves from sectarian politics, meaning most seculars, find themselves alienated: they lack political elite representation and find themselves excluded from essential services such as health care, education and other social services, generally provided by sectarian political parties. The Freedom House (2017) states that “Lebanon’s troubled political system ensures representation for its many sectarian communities, but suppresses competition within each community and impedes the rise of cross-sectarian or secularist parties” (Lebanon, freedomhouse.org). The nature of Lebanon’s consociational system renders it nearly impossible for secular parties to enter the political arena. Furthermore, voting is confined to sectarian candidates who are of the same sect as the majority of the people within each electoral district.

Secular sentiments have re-surfaced on a national scale in Lebanon throughout the past several years. Although secular or leftist groups from the Civil War era never disappeared, resurgence in youth movements such as the massive “YouStink” protests amongst other movements alike, have reshaped and re-ignited the leftist groups. Although notions such as “secular” and “left” are interchangeable in Lebanon, left is a broader term, and various groups in addition to secularists have or even still consider themselves to be leftist, such as some Lebanese who aligned themselves with the PLO throughout the Civil War and beyond, mobilizing in favor of the Palestinians. Those people for example, may not necessarily be secularists as some closely align themselves with Islam, and secularists tend to disassociate themselves from any religious affiliation. Having said this, the new “left”, is relatively different from the “left” before and throughout the Civil War, as some end goals differ. Whereas before and during the Civil

War the leftist movement saw a lot of mobilization in support of the Palestinians and pan-Arabism in addition to secularism, the present left has shifted its focus to tackle corruption, to defeat the confessional system in Lebanon and to address issues such as the garbage crisis, adoption of civil marriage and increased rights for the non-religious. Nonetheless, major pillars of the leftist movement have remained the same since its inception and this includes secularization (Haugbolle, 2013, p. 431). According to Haugbolle, “Some of the agendas of the 1970s and earlier decades correlate with those of today, but there are also contradictions and multiple contentions within the leftist landscape” (p. 431). There are however three fundamental goals that have been engrained in the leftist agenda since the 1920’s until present and they include social justice, anti-sectarianism and anti-imperialism (p.431).

This paper aims to shed light on the relationship between consociationalism and secular alienation, addressing a fundamental question: how do political-religious elites maintain the consociational status quo, and how do they prevent secular groups from participating in politics in Lebanon? Answering this question, will require two steps. At a more macro level, we will demonstrate that consociationalism (power-sharing), despite its perceived progressive features, in fact contributes to the rigidity of power relations and to increased clientelism in Lebanon. At a micro level, we will identify the strategies and practices put in place by political-religious elites in Lebanon to delegitimize and demobilize the secular groups. I argue that the consociational system in Lebanon has fostered an environment where political-religious elites mobilize to prevent anti-sectarian legislation, politicizing and co-opting emerging civil society groups, framing their role as vital for the stability of the country in an unstable environment, suppressing activism and

dissent, maintaining a strong clientele of voters by means of bribes and employment, and by controlling the media and framing messages. In short, power sharing in Lebanon has established a favorable environment for political-religious elites to exclude secularists.

Below, I present and discuss consociationalism as a concept and how it has been implemented in different parts of the world. I also discuss some of the shortcomings of consociationalism, followed by a section devoted to the Lebanese case studies. There, I provide some brief historical background on Lebanese politics, followed by a presentation of the consociational model in this country. I will then present the various ways by which the sectarian consociational model is maintained in Lebanon and how sectarian elites are preventing secular movements and ideas from thriving. I will also briefly discuss how secularists are challenging the elites and the system in Lebanon. The final section will provide concluding remarks, discussing some limitations to the study and offering future avenues for research.

Section 1: Consociationalism in Comparative Perspective

1.1 What is Consociationalism?

Arend Lijphart (1969) is a principal scholar in consociationalism, a notion meant to describe various models of political power sharing, most commonly applied in heterogeneous societies, with a goal of achieving balanced political representation amongst all factions existing within a state. It relies unequivocally on elites, who represent various subcultures within the country (Lijphart, 2008, p. 31-32). According to Lijphart (2008), “Consociational democracy means government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy” (p. 31).

It is a formula for ethnically divided countries, with two or more divided factions to peacefully live amongst each other (Ulrich Schneckener, 2002, p. 204). Generally, it is realized as an ideal model when democracy by majority rule is counter-intuitive and when there are a lack of alternatives. In Hudson's (1976) view, it is the lone option for elites to "... preserve mutual advantages and promote mass tranquility" (p. 111). Though it was first used as a concept to analyze democratic systems in peaceful Western democracies (the Netherlands, Belgium), the concept has been increasingly utilized in post-conflict situations. Elites may realize there is no alternative in sight, and consequentially, for the sake of preserving the peace, will form a coalition government and share power. Lijphart (1969), adds that the "The essential characteristic of consociational democracy is not so much any particular institutional arrangement as the deliberate joint effort by the elites to stabilize the system" (p. 213). Generally, after a civil war, when one-side is victorious over the other, the conditions of power sharing are indeed better and the durability of consociationalism is longer (Mukherjee, 2006, p. 497).

According to Arend Lijphart (2008), consociationalism has four characteristics including *grand coalition*; meaning an inclusive cabinet representative of all factions, *cultural autonomy*; whereby autonomy and authority is granted to various groups to control certain institutions and functions (e.g. education system), democracy through *proportionality* or proportional representation and, *minority veto* allowing minorities to block attempts at legislation (p. 45-49). Peripherally, consociationalism appears progressive and inclusive but it is the same characteristics that appear to be democratically sound, which foster an environment conducive to a rigid political system such as the one in Lebanon. For example, *minority veto*, allows sectarian elites who

represent certain factions, to continually block key policies, to serve their vested interests and potentially the interests of the population in which they represent. Its underlying goal is the protection of minorities but unfortunately, in situations where a complex sectarian relationship exists or where there are hard-lined elites, minority veto will have contradictory effects. According to Schneckener (2002), the aim of veto rights is “to foster consensus-building and the search for compromises. The right to veto could apply unrestrictedly to all decisions (absolute veto), it could be conditional and just refer to some basic laws, or it could just have a delaying effect in order to renegotiate disputed issues” (p. 205).

Similarly, the element of *cultural autonomy* grants subcultures and their elites authority over institutions and certain functions, allowing them to disassociate themselves from the broader national spectrum. Schneckener (2002), states the following, “Segmented autonomy: each group enjoys some degree of self-government; it maintains its own elected bodies, institutions and competencies. Only few issues have therefore to be coordinated with other segments of society” (p. 205). Religious institutions and elites tend to control and instill sectarian doctrine in young children and in youth, ultimately swaying them away from secular and unifying education (Baytiyeh, 2017, p. 547-556). Distancing a population from other segments of society naturally creates this illusion of divide and difference, which is rather problematic to national unity.

Scholars of consociationalism have categorized countries using the notion in two distinct categories: liberal consociationalism and corporate consociationalism. The latter as we see in Lebanon, is more rigid, as generally, it allows political representation to pre-

determined and fixed groups, which may or may not be listed in a constitution. It does not allow future emerging minorities or groups that are not recognized to participate in the political apparatus of the country. This would be the case for instance in a sectarian system, whereby seculars would not be considered a legitimate minority (Lijphart, 2008; McCulloch, 2014; Nagle, 2018). At a given moment, when consociationalism is applied, the sub-cultures included in the power-sharing system are frozen, and only those recognized at the time will govern, usually forever. It prevents change and diversity and fails to adapt to the demographically fluctuating situation of any country (McCulloch, 2014, p. 501). According to McCulloch (2014), “Corporate consociation freezes a particular inter-group configuration in time, leading to drawn-out executive formation and, in some cases, to a cementing of divisions” (p. 501). Furthermore, corporate consociationalism, provides autonomy and power to religious elites who in turn may suppress secular groups, LGBT rights and implement their control over laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance (Nagle, 2018, p. 78).

Liberal consociationalism is perceived to be accommodating and inclusive as it allows all sub-cultures to participate in politics. According to McCulloch (2014), “Liberal consociationalism avoids constitutionally entrenching group representation by leaving the question of who shares power in the hands of voters” (p. 503). In this case, cross-sectarian or cross-culture voting is easier. Nonetheless, the liberal form is a consociational model, and distributes power reflecting the populations of the existing groups.

1.2 Advantages of Consociationalism

In light of the existence of multiple factions in a country, pro-consociationalists argue that majority-rule cannot be applied, and alternatively power sharing must be implemented. Scholars who favor power sharing for heterogeneous societies (especially ones with a history of conflict), fear majority-rule democracy. Consociationalists argue that majority-rule increases vulnerabilities for minorities in pluralist societies. But they may underestimate the effect this model has for those who do not identify with any of the recognized groups. Although power sharing is inclusive, some consociational regimes do not embrace all factions. This generally applies to corporate consociationalism as opposed to the liberal form. Arend Lijphart (2008) prefers the liberal form premised on self-determination, because it does not cause religious segregation, is a more fluid model, that is far more inclusive of all existing minorities, is flexible, and does not foster deep ethno-geographic cleavages (Ch. 4). This model, however, does not entirely resolve the issue of self-determination, as the consociational model, even in its liberal form, imposes some constraints on the nature of the cleavages.

Governments, or elite groups negotiating peace and stability in the country, usually have legitimate intentions and sufficient rationale when they want to implement consociationalism. Numerous circumstances, specifically after civil wars, warrant its application. Incentives for consociational countries to remain status quo include the model's inclusive and accommodating characteristics, and the strong minority rights and autonomy granted to various groups. Furthermore, an existing sentiment of mistrust between factions in conflict-ridden nations who have adopted consociationalism will inherently make assimilation difficult to adopt, due to a sense of suspicion towards one

another (McGarry and O’Leary, 2006, p. 258). Referring to assimilation in Northern Ireland, McGarry and O’Leary (2006) state that “People express tolerant preferences but practice suspicion: a common feature of ethnically divided societies” (p. 258).

Additionally, promoters of consociationalism argue that existing power sharing regimes are rigid and the division of power between factions is deeply entrenched, making it extremely difficult to reform. Nagle (2016) argues that hard lined elites would not respond to reform positively, increasing the chances of instability: “Elite level discourses about ethnicity and identity, I argue, place strict boundaries on fostering institutional revision” (p. 1146). Paul Dixon (2012) argues that transformationists (those in favor of reforming or removing consociationalism) are excessively utopian and unrealistic, presuming that entrenched identities are malleable and easily transformable (p.99). According to Dixon (2012), “Advocates of the civil society approach, in contrast, take an instrumentalist view of identity and are optimistic that a radical transformation can be achieved by mobilizing the people against ‘hard-line’ political representatives” (p. 99).

Various countries such as North Ireland, Burundi, Kosovo and Cyprus have adopted power-sharing arrangements successfully. Kosovo has embraced some elements of power sharing to accommodate the Serbs for example. Although Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, some Serbs loyal to Serbia remained in Kosovo land, continually demanding autonomy and rights, which is why consociationalism is essential (Rossi, 2014, p. 869). Although the Serbs live in Kosovo peacefully, a sensitive ethno-political line dividing both communities does exist and therefore power must be

administered cautiously (p. 881). According to Rossi, "...some form of power sharing in Kosovo not only seems an inevitable scenario, but maximizes the interests of both sides" (p. 873). Moreover, McGarry and O'Leary (2006) criticize anti-consociationalists, as they claim that assimilation does not work in Northern Ireland and that consociationalism is the remedy to peace between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, contributing to the disarmament of the IRA (p. 260). McGarry (2016) endorses consociationalism for the Turkish-Cypriot case. Cyprus is divided between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and they cooperate through power sharing. In Cyprus' case, power sharing is advantageous as it provides minority rights and veto power to Turkish Cypriots, which they deem essential, and provides autonomy to the Turks who do not wish to conglomerate under a presidential system (McGarry, 2016, p. 515-516). Finally, power sharing in Burundi eliminated the one-party rule, created short-term stability, addressed grievances from those who were misrepresented and provided a channel of communication and cooperation between the government and rebels (Vaneginste, 2009, p. 81). For Vaneginste (2009), power sharing in Burundi was successful: "By and large, when measured against the objective of war termination, the use of power-sharing can - so far - be considered to be a success story in the case of Burundi" (p. 81).

Vaneginste (2009), Bumba Mukherjee (2006), Paul Dixon (2012), Allison McCulloch (2014), and Gabriel Sheffer (1999) are in what I consider the neutral camp. Their positions on consociationalism are either neutral, circumstantial (preferring consociationalism under certain conditions) or they are simply oblivious to a position on power sharing. Their perspective is nuanced, contextual and balanced. Dixon (2012) has a constructivist approach and critiques both consociationalists and transformationists. He

emphasizes the importance of understanding the context before making a decision on power sharing. According to Dixon (2012), neither consociationalists nor transformationists present a convincing argument as the former are overly pessimistic and focus on elite power while the latter are utopian and out of touch with reality (p. 99). Mukherjee (2006) similarly to Dixon, has a contextual approach and emphasizes the importance of a country's conditions and reality. Referring to power sharing, he indicates that "... a good predictive theory in this issue area should explain not just when power-sharing agreements successfully promote peace but also the conditions under which power-sharing agreements fail" (p. 484).

McCulloch (2014) does not dismiss power sharing, but prefers the liberal version as it does not entrench identities and allows for the emergence of non-sectarian and non-ethnic political parties (p. 509). For Gabriel Sheffer (1999), swaying away from consociationalism creates political autonomy and liberalization but may also weaken the executive as seen in the case of Israel (p. 157). Vaneginste (2009), agrees that power sharing was useful in the short-term but argues that it failed in the long-term for Burundi. According to Vaneginste:

"...when measured against the objective of war termination the use of power-sharing can – so far – be considered to be a success story in the case of Burundi... when measured against more ambitious state-building purposes... Burundi clearly has a very long way to go and consociational power-sharing has so far not been able to make a difference" (p. 81).

Clearly, consociationalism serves a temporary purpose and is essential in ending conflict. However, it does not offer any guarantee about the sustainability of stability and peace in the long-term.

1.3 Limitations of Consociationalism

Reformists argue that consociationalism is too rigid, exceedingly elite oriented, non-integrative as it excludes smaller groups such as secularists, lacks durability, fails to correspond to the changing reality in demographics, suppresses losers of conflict after civil war and prevents civil political involvement (Rothchild, 2005; Shields, 2008; Keman, 1999; Makdissi and Marktanner, 2009; Salamey, 2009; Connors, 1996; Sani, 2009; Spears, 2002; Nagle, 2018).

As we learned, consociationalism emphasizes veto power in parliament, freezing any progressive legislation from passing, usually because it does not satisfy the elite agenda. The element of veto undermines the possibility of having a strong government because it is equated with a lack of policy development and unified state (Salamey, 2009, p. 84). According to Salamey (2009), “The corporate consociational structure of the state that allowed sectarian groups to hold semi-veto power over national decisions was a decisive factor in the establishment of safe sectarian enclaves” (p. 91). Elites veto anti-sectarian policies, promote policies that serve their vested interests and as a result safeguard sectarian “enclaves”.

A wide array of countries have unsuccessfully experimented with consociationalism or have experienced issues throughout their tenure with power sharing,

including South Africa, the Netherlands, Malaysia, and several African countries. Some concerns various groups in different countries express include anxiety around power withdrawal, political exclusion or alienation and loss of autonomy.

As Rothchild (2005) notes, various African countries experienced difficulty in implementing power sharing. Factional groups felt uneasy, fearing a loss of power and autonomy if they joined a broader coalition under power sharing measures. For the weaker factions, exclusion was also a major concern (Rothchild, 2005, p. 258). Rothchild states, "...groups may fear a weakening of power as a consequence of participation in a national grand coalition. It is assumed that participation in a grand coalition represents a form of pressure that pushes them in the direction of cooperation" (p. 258). A separate issue is the inability of the consociational model to cope with the fluidity and changing nature of ethnicity. South Africa for example, saw major demographic and ethnic fluctuations from the apartheid era to present-time, which would have rendered consociationalism inept if it had been fully implemented. The country saw significant revolutionary change after apartheid, shifting interests in the country (Connors, 1996, p. 424-425). Popular mobilization would have materialized if consociationalism had been fully adopted, due to the change in demographics and interests. This would have most likely resulted in additional political problems.

In Malaysia, consociationalism has placed a barrier between the citizenry and the political elites as individuals are alienated and political deliberation is exclusively reserved for elites, leaving out the Malaysian population (Sani, 2009, p. 100). Consequentially, this ignited a civil society movement, which mobilized against the

government's consociational practices, resulting in the partial implementation of deliberative democracy. Sani (2009) indicates "Malaysia is beginning to embrace the new politics of deliberative democracy, leaving behind the old politics of consociational democracy. Consociationalism and power sharing as practiced by the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) has permitted elite deliberation only" (p. 97).

The Netherlands, arguably the most stable out of the nations mentioned above, has successfully implemented power sharing but with difficulty. According to Keman (1999), consociationalism appears rational and progressive, however, it serves the elites' social interests and misrepresents a socially segmented populace in the Netherlands (p. 251). Moreover, the issue of non-decision due to minority veto is also problematic in Keman's (1999) vision. Power sharing "appears to misrepresent a (societally segmented) population and is often bound to make non-decisions as a result of voting cycles created by larger minorities in parliament" (p. 257).

It is evident that consociationalism has proved problematic for various countries. Its short-term, restrictive and primordial characteristics have fostered unfavorable conditions for democracy, especially when the corporate version is applied. The next section will present why this is problematic and how elites in Lebanon have used consociationalism to their advantage to stay in power and alienate secularists. But first, a brief historical background of the modern political scene is in order.

Section 2: Politics in Lebanon: Brief Historical Background

Lebanon's independence, which came to fruition in 1943, was fundamentally

premised on the National Pact, marking the inception of consociationalism in Lebanon. The National Pact, arguably one of the more constructive moments in Lebanese history, was a result of the collective aspirations of Muslims and Christians to achieve freedom from France (Kerr and O'Leary, 2005, p. 132). This mutual effort from the Lebanese people was supported by pressure from Great Britain who lobbied against France, in favor of Lebanon's independence (Kerr and O'Leary, 2005, p. 132). According to Kerr and O'Leary (2005), "The unwritten compromise of 1943 went on to become Lebanon's National Pact, a power-sharing agreement between Christians and Muslims that dealt with the two most pressing issues in Lebanese politics: foreign policy in the new Arab World and the distribution of political power between Lebanon's communities" (p. 132). The Pact obligated both religious factions to make sacrifices. It required the Muslims remain neutral and distance themselves from pan-Arab political thought, while Christians were requested to terminate their connections with the French (p. 133).

The compromise between the Christians and Muslims lead to the creation of Lebanese parliament. Initially, seats were distributed at a ratio of 6:5 for Christians and Muslims, later amended to a ratio of 6:6 upon the signing of the Ta'if agreement in 1989 in order to achieve equal representation reflective of the population. The successful implementation of the National Pact was contingent on the efforts of the sectarian elite. At the time, the main sectarian players were Riad El Solh who was the Muslim Prime Minister during independence and Bechara el Khoury who was the Christian President (Najem, 2012, p.14). Although the National Pact was not written, sectarian elites respected its objective, sharing mutual goals.

The current political landscape in Lebanon is increasingly convoluted. Whereas during the Civil War, the religious divide was pre-dominantly Christians against Muslims, the past two decades has seen a surge in coalitions and deeper divisions amongst sub-cultures. The emergence of various coalitions is not necessarily a negative aspect. On the one hand, it has led to the formation of alliances between a number of Christian and Muslim political parties, softening the Christian-Muslim divide, moreover, it has created multifaceted coalitions and deep divides between sub-sects (e.g. Alawites and Shia against Sunnis in the North of Lebanon). The surge in Muslim-Christian alliances and the political shifting has softened the negative memories from the Civil War era but has also spurred new conflicts and caused political disarray due to vetoes, alliance imbalance and general animosity as a result of this instability. In Lebanon, there are two well-established coalitions within the Lebanese political spectrum. The March 14 coalition includes the Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, *Kataeb* Party and they are opposed to the March 8 Coalition containing Hezbollah, *Amal* Movement, Free Patriotic Movement and the *Marada* Movement. These are the big players within each alliance in addition to other smaller parties.

The two coalitions emerged after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Al Hariri, on February 14, 2005. The March 14 alliance, led by his son and current Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad Al Hariri, accuse Hezbollah and the Assad Syrian regime for the assassination of Rafiq, while the March 8 coalition, completely dismiss these accusations. The death of Rafiq Al Hariri enticed the March 14 coalition to hold massive protests and apply pressure on the Assad regime to leave the country, which at that time still had a presence in Lebanon. The Syrian exit from Lebanon was one of the main

catalysts for the formation of the two coalitions and deepening of the cleavages (Salloukh, 2013, p. 36).

Another notable conflict post-Civil War era, is the 2008 Political Crisis, which was a "...crisis following Hezbollah's military takeover of Beirut" (p. 39). In May of 2008, the country faced a critical moment that saw the March 8 and March 14 camps clash in Beirut. The conflict was fueled by the government's decision to remove the chief security officer at Beirut International Airport, who was allegedly supporting Hezbollah in addition to shutting-down Hezbollah's key telecommunications line provoking them and their allies to take to the streets, to clash and create ruckus (e.g. burning tires, taking over buildings). The conflict, which was responsible for over 60 deaths, ended with a truce, brokered by the army and facilitated by mediation from a Qatari led delegation. The end of the conflict was marked by the election of a new president, Michel Suleiman.

Although consociationalism is not directly linked to the 2008 crisis, a presidential vacuum from November 2007 until the conflict in May 2008 is largely to blame, arguably due to the vetoes and rigidity of the consociational model. The absence of a president created instability, contributing to the 2008 crisis. Other moments that have stunned Lebanon include the 2006 war with Israel and the political stalemate from May 2014 until October 2016. The war with Israel took a toll on the Lebanese economy and on tourism while the political stalemate created deep instabilities, as members of parliament failed to agree on a president. Although the presidential responsibilities defaulted to the Prime Minister, the political vacuum threatened major national security and was partially the cause of civil strife such as "YouStink", a movement against the lack of environmental

legislation and against corruption.

Though Lebanon's political history seems to be monopolized by sectarian groups, the country also included, and still contains, a number of secularist forces, which do not share the confessional understanding of the political reality. In their first phase, before the Civil War, Lebanese secularists, pre-dominantly leftist groups, were mostly focusing on three core principles: social justice, anti-sectarianism and anti-imperialism (Haugbolle, 2013, p. 431). They began to express dissent vis-à-vis the consociational model only in the 1960s, as calls against power sharing politics and demands to reform the discriminatory sectarian system became common practice amongst student groups, Baathist groups, communist party loyalists, secularists, and other members of society (Ofeish, 1999, p. 102). By 1975, Muslims who supported the Palestinian cause began fighting with Maronites, triggering the Civil War. The war intensified sectarian sentiments, and this pushed the leftist groups to resort to arms as they supported the Muslims throughout the war. The Lebanon-Israel war fueled secularists even further as they aligned themselves with Muslim militias (Ofeish, 1999, p. 103). Maaroufi (2014) argues, "After the civil war and during the process of reconstruction, the main leftists parties had lost a big part of their popularity and credibility as a result of their implication in the war. A new form of secular movements made its appearance, namely civil associations and NGOs" (p. 9). The "new" secular movement morphed from the political movement to civil society organizations that relied on social habits, clothing, marriage patterns, style and overall culture (Haugbolle, 2013, p. 429). The movement became socio-political as members left behind weaponry and fighting for protests, sit-ins, social activism and social campaigns.

Some examples of more recent secular protest and dissent include Take Back Parliament (TBP) and the 2015 “YouStink” protests. TBP was an anti-sectarian and anti-consociational movement that saw activists across Lebanon collectively form a non-sectarian political unity and compete against established sectarian coalitions: March 8 and March 14. Its focus was eradicating socio-economic inequality and corruption and was premised on three fundamental principles, establishing a secular state, transparency and providing an alternative political option (Maaroufi, 2014, p. 10). They utilized unconventional methods such as social media to convey their platform and intended to be on the ballot in the 2013 General Lebanese Elections which never materialized as politicians failed to agree on a president and extended their mandate until 2018. Although TBP never attained their objectives, they brought like-minded secular activists together, shed light on the elite corruption, energized activists and youth for future protest movements, and provided disenchanted groups in Lebanon a voice and a political option (Maaroufi, 2014, p. 19-22). TBP ultimately set a precedent, providing momentum for future protests such as the “YouStink” 2015 demonstrations.

Section 3: Preserving Sectarian Consociationalism and Undermining Secularism in Lebanon

3.1 The Sectarian Consociational System in Lebanon

The consociational model in Lebanon is rather complex. In 1943, seats were distributed at a ratio of 6:5 for Christians and Muslims, and it was amended in 1989 to a ratio of 6:6 upon the signing of the Ta’if agreement in order to achieve equal representation reflective of the population. Power distribution in Lebanon balances power

between various homogenous factions, within a highly complex and heterogeneous society. The political model is responsible for the allocation of power to many of the 18 sects accounted for in Lebanon. Within the Muslim religion, there are the Shia, Sunni, Druze and Alawites and under the Christian religion, Greek Orthodox, Maronite and Armenian Orthodox. Each faction is allocated seats in parliament and every sect is represented by a minimum of one political party.

Lebanese parliament has 128 seats, all belonging to sectarian elites. Constitutional restrictions and the nature of the corporate consociational model prevent the allocation of seats to individuals or parties who disassociate themselves from any religiously affiliated political party. The seats are distributed as follows: under the Christian umbrella, Maronites are allocated 34 seats, Greek Orthodox, 14; Melkite Catholic, 8; Armenian Orthodox, 5; Armenian Catholic, 1; Protestants, 1 and Other Christians, 1. Under the Muslim umbrella, Shia and Sunni each have 27 seats respectively, the Druze are allocated 8 and Alawites have 2. In total, Christians and Muslims are allocated 64 seats each. The main political parties that represent these sects are the Free Patriotic Movement (Maronite), Lebanese Forces (Maronite), *Kataeb* Party (Maronite), Socialist Progressive Party (Druze), Hezbollah (Shia), *Amal* Movement (Shia) and the Future Movement (Sunni), which is currently the biggest political party. Other smaller parties exist as well.

Spears (2002) explains that consociationalism under a civil war context, equates to “making a deal with the devil”, simply to restore temporary peace (p. 127). According to Spears (2002), “A central obstacle to sharing power in the context of a civil war, then, is psychological: One is required to make peace and cooperate with an enemy rather than

a political opponent” (p. 126). Upon completion of the violent 1975 Civil War, consociationalism forced these communal, loyal sects to share power with groups they detested. Nonetheless, the end goal was to defend their sectarian vested interests.

It is important to emphasize that power sharing alone is not the cause of political turmoil in Lebanon. Nonetheless, the model serves as a temporary solution, has constricted adaptability and in Lebanon’s case, is based on primordial thought (Rothchild, 2005 and Spears, 2002). Furthermore, the rise of armed groups, including the most powerful of them, Hezbollah, during and after the Civil War has made the system even more problematic. Sriram and Zahar (2009) explain armed groups complicate consociationalism even further as they tend to lower the chances of achieving some sort of stability (p. 18). In sum, though consociationalism aimed at solving a number of problems, before and after the war, it nonetheless created major tensions while maintaining some forms of exclusion. Those who did not identify with the sectarian model, mainly the secularists, were severely hampered in their attempts to reform or change the system. How sectarian elites have weakened secularist individuals and movements is the subject of the next section.

3.2 Sectarian Elites’ Strategies and the Alienation of Secularists in Lebanon

How have political-religious elites in Lebanon barred secular groups from political participation? Consociationalism in Lebanon has provided an avenue for religious elites to mobilize against secularists. The model in Lebanon has fostered an environment where political sectarian elites mobilize by limiting choice through electoral rules, by preventing anti-sectarian legislation, by bribing through sect-based clientelism, in addition to co-optation strategies, coercion and finally framing their role as essential

for the well-being of the country, especially through the media.

Limiting Choice Through Electoral Rules

By designing certain electoral rules, Lebanese elites made it difficult for non-sectarian interests to be represented. Electoral restrictions impose major constraints upon Lebanese citizens who see their liberty of choice quite limited. Smaller sects or non-religious communities, including secularists, feminists, LGBT people are excluded from the electoral scene (Makdissi and Marktanner, 2009, p. 2). In effect, As MacQueen (2016) explains, “The electoral system in Lebanon works to severely manage or actively exclude popular participation and entrench control of a fixed set of confessional elites” (p. 73). Also, the consociational model in Lebanon facilitates the elite’s ability to continually infiltrate the religious divide and gain sectarian votes. According to Salamey (2009) “A plurality list-based majority system within districts of a manageable size provided the incumbent confessional elites with the ability to trade votes across sectarian lines without necessarily soliciting votes from their own social grouping” (p. 84). The electoral model is based on a “plurality list-based” system, and each electoral district in Lebanon, depending on its size and population, is allocated a certain number of seats and each seat has a designated sect. For example, the electoral district of *Jezzine* had four seats, three belonging to Maronites and one belonging to Greek Catholic. Regardless of the political party, voters are limited to choosing Maronite and Greek Catholic political elites for that area.

The Use of Legislation to Prevent Change

Consociational elites maintain their power in part through the enactment of laws which deny the recognition of rights to people who do not identify with a confessional

group, and which block non-confessional social dynamics from rising. As Nagle (2018) argues, “While specific rights are granted to the main ethnic groups, a range of less powerful identity groups – typically with cross-cutting membership – are left outside the realm of representation, including feminists, migrants, secularists, and sexual minorities, meaning that disidentifying from ethnicity have little right of exit” (p. 77).

Marital law is a very good example of how non-confessional dynamics are legally constrained. In effect, “Lebanon does not have civil marriage; however, the country recognizes civil marriage which took place outside Lebanese territory” (Mattar Law Firm). Although Lebanese people cannot be married under civil law in Lebanon, some people exit to countries such as Cyprus, marry, and return. Zuhur (2002) states, “Under existing laws, couples must be married by religious officials or in a religious contract. When members of a couple are of different religious backgrounds, one may convert so that they may marry” (p. 184). Secularists who wish to not identify with a sect are provided two options: either marry under a specific religion, or face the burden of travelling to another country to marry. There have been previous attempts to legalize civil marriage but they were faced with heavy opposition from sectarian elites (Baytiyeh, 2016, p. 553). For example, in 1998, former President, Elias Hrawi, in response to an outpour of criticism from secularists against the marital system in Lebanon, proposed draft legislation to allow civil marriage but this was quickly halted in parliament as a result of pressure from religious elites (The Daily Star Lebanon, July 8, 2006). The proposed legislation in 1998 gained a lot of prominence in Lebanon but was repeatedly blocked by elites as they saw it as an avenue for secularists to take over the country (Ofeish, 1999, p. 110-111). More recently, new draft proposals for civil marriage were

introduced in the fall of 2017, but have yet to make it to parliament. Despite the determination of several civil society organizations and lawmakers to provide an avenue for secular marriage, religious elites feel threatened and fear a wave of secularism would ensue if civil marriage or similar legislation were ever to be implemented.

The judicial system reinforces elite needs and as such, discriminates against secularists, as their fundamental rights are not protected (Maaroufi, 2014, p. 6). As Maaroufi (2014) indicates, “Regardless of the sectarian components of the Lebanese legal system, the judicial system can be criticized for not granting just legal conditions and protection for everybody living in Lebanon” (p. 6). A lack of judicial protection for secularists weakens them, provides religious elites political leverage, in turn alienating the secularists and reinforcing the elite-driven status quo.

The consociational model in Lebanon equips sectarian elites with political mobilization tools such as the ability to pressure, veto and block pro-secular legislation. Elements inherent in the constitution justify the alienation of seculars in Lebanon. For example, article 534 in Lebanon’s criminal code prevents individuals from publicly identifying themselves as homosexuals fostering homophobia while LGBT activists are denied all rights (Nagle, 2018, p.80). In addition to civil marriage, religious elites in Lebanon control laws that govern divorce, custody and inheritance (Nagle, 2018, p.78). The sectarian nature of these essential laws force seculars to follow rules against their moral principles.

Resorting to Sect-Based Clientelism

A major strategy which confessional elites use is the allocation of resources through clientelistic channels, which aim at favoring not all citizens, but rather individuals with whom they are connected by lineage and/or confessional ties. As Salti and Chaaban (2010) explain, “the Lebanese experience has been tainted by the constraint of confessional balance that allows sectarian identity to supersede citizenship in the scheme of resource allocation” (p. 653). In other words, the confessionalization of institutions has hardened sectarian thought and enabled elite clientelism. According to Baumann (2016), “Confessional power-sharing creates an elite-cartel. Access to political office is due to the leaders’ claims to represent ‘their’ confessional community. As a result, incumbent elites have an incentive to maintain sect as the main perspective on politics” (p. 635).

The allocation of resources became especially prevalent after the 1975 Civil War. The post-war era saw the rise of various sectarian elites and political militia leaders who increasingly tightened their grip on power and on the economic realm in Lebanon (many elites began controlling key corporations), in turn facilitating the distribution of key resources to their sectarian clientele (Ofeish, 1999, p. 112). Elites provide employment on a clientelistic basis, favoring individuals demonstrating partisan loyalty, interconnectedness and sect. Clark and Salloukh (2013), use the Lebanese Association for Democratic elections (LADE) to exemplify this: “...the leadership of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) complained that, in 2009, their pre-election monitors – unpaid volunteers – were offered positions in the campaign machines of more than one sectarian party, with promises of hefty salaries” (p. 742).

Admittance to hospitals and general healthcare is also solely based on interconnectedness and sect. Access to education also displays clear signs of clientelistic preferences: people related to elites have access to private education, while those who are excluded from such connections must send their children to poorly funded public schools. Since a lot of these social services are sectarian or partisan based, they only allow or in certain situations provide preferential treatment to those of the same sect or those who support the party that the institution is affiliated with. For example, some hospitals are affiliated with Hezbollah and provide preferential treatment accordingly. Cammett (2011), did an interview with “a hospital worker in the predominantly Shi’a city of Nabatieh in South Lebanon”, who told her that “Ninety percent of the patients who go to the Hezbollah Ragheb Harb Hospital in Nabatieh are in the party. If you don’t have papers from Hezbollah or connections to it, then you don’t get help from Hezbollah and you go to the Nejdeh hospital instead” (p. 87).

This process of selectively allocating resources is a strategic maneuver on the part of elites to ensure the Lebanese populace continues to support them, and more generally, support the confessionalized political system produced by consociationalism. Therefore, anyone who actively supports the elite or the party and anyone who is active in their events and meetings will most likely receive various incentives including financial help, free and good healthcare and sophisticated education (Cammett, 2011, p. 86). In Barker (2005), we saw that frames resonate with certain individuals more than others (p. 377). Anyone who relies on resources from a particular sectarian party is more likely to be affected by their frames compared to seculars who don’t associate themselves with a sectarian party. Resource allocation in itself is a frame, and in some cases, a brainwash,

as it alters people's mindsets and limits their thoughts. It triggers people to think of the party in a positive manner and exclude any negativity surrounding the party given the positive association between resource allocation and the party. This leaves the seculars on the periphery, unless of course they are co-opted and convinced to become part of the sectarian cohort in Lebanon. This mobilization strategy is very effective as it forces people to flock behind the sectarian elite due to the incentives provided.

The Use of Co-optation

A strategy closely related to clientelism is that of co-optation. In effect, to weaken non-sectarian groups or movements, and thus to make sure that the confessional model is not seriously threatened, elites in Lebanon have resorted to co-optation strategies (Ofeish, 1999, p. 100). For example, the *Taxi Drivers Union*, which was created in 1969 by secular taxi drivers, was "weakened under the Hariri government when Minister Abdallah al-Amine [1992-95] granted his Amal Movement a licence to create a new union for taxi drivers" (AbiYaghi, 2012, p. 21). This co-optation transformed what was once a secular union into a sectarian one, further weakening the overall secular movement (p. 21).

Another example is that of the *Lebanese Council of Women (LCW)*, one of the largest feminist NGOs running in Lebanon, an open organization, allowing members from all facets of society to become member (Clark and Salloukh, 2013, p. 738). But this 'open nature' was seen as an opportunity by sectarian elites, who began to enter the ranks of the group to eventually take control of it: "An examination of the LCW's membership list reveals that the vast majority of its 170 member NGOs are sectarian based. Virtually all sectarian and political parties have a presence in the LCW, primarily through NGOs

affiliated with the parties' women committees" (p. 739). Because sectarian groups manage to infiltrate such civil society organization, a secular voice for many sensitive topics dissipate, sectarian groups begin pressuring members to align their values with specific political parties and finally, elites will provide incentives to members to politicize certain factions of the organization to align itself with sectarian values (p. 738-739). In a similar way, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL), which originally represented all workers regardless of the sect, was gradually put under the control of sectarian elites: "the confessional leadership ultimately infiltrated the CGTL, neutralizing it by manipulating its electoral processes" (AbiYaghi, 2012, p. 21).

The Use of Coercion

"At least 30 people were hurt, according to the Red Cross. Dozens of people were injured on Saturday, when the police also used rubber bullets. On Sunday night, chaotic scenes unfolded as demonstrators refused to disperse and entered Martyrs' Square, an expanse of empty space created by the destruction of Lebanon's civil war a generation ago" (Saad, New York Times, August 24, 2015).

- Description of the 2015 "YouStink" Protests and police reaction, The New York Times

"Graduate students received an email from Dean of Student Affairs, Talal Nizameddin, on Nov. 20 urging them to remove the tent or face "serious disciplinary action." Shortly after, what was initially designated as an occupation of space, the tent was surrounded by dozens of students calling for fair working conditions and the payment of labor" (The Outlook AUB, November 22, 2017).

-Description of how graduate students at the American University of Beirut (AUB) lost their scholarship because they protested against labor issues, The Outlook AUB

“These cases were among a series of recent legal moves against entertainers, journalists and activists in Lebanon that rights groups worry could stifle free expression in one of the Arab world’s freest environments. While the reason for the rise in cases remains unclear, many suspect that powerful parties are using the courts to prevent criticism of the authorities before parliamentary elections this year” (Hubbard, New York Times, February 21, 2018).

-Referring to the government’s legal action against Hisham Haddad, a comedian who continually insults political elites on the air, and was charged with defaming Saudi Prince Bin Salman, The New York Times

The above-mentioned excerpts illustrate examples of coercive mobilization, a more overt tactic relative to others strategies. Protest diffusion, coercion and judicial pressure are quite widespread. This method includes violence, judicial inequality and usually manifests itself publicly throughout the media. It is reactive and in direct response to public mobilization efforts. This process involves the mobilization of state agents in an attempt to deal with counter-mobilizing forces. It is typically a last resort, when elites feel threatened, as they did during the 2015 “YouStink” protests.

Direct state intervention during protests is explicit and manifests itself through videos and graphic images. We clearly saw this throughout the 2015 “YouStink” protests in Lebanon. Attempts to divide and coopt the Lebanese activists throughout the campaign failed, forcing state actors to take to the streets and diffuse the protests (Kraidy, 2016, p. 20). This ultimately backfired, as activists exposed police brutality and military

intervention by posting on social media and revealing the coercive techniques elites were utilizing to shut secularists out (Khalil, 2017, p. 206). Khalil (2017) indicates that, “While the demonstrators were subject to police brutality in the squares, many supporters were retaliating online by posting comments, uploading videos shot on the run and together with images from TV broadcasts was evidence of series of violations” (p. 206).

Throughout the “YouStink” protests, elites ordered police to take-in activists, shoot rubber bullets, deny them access to various public locations and to use other means of violence (using their baton, kicking, spraying water, etc...). From a public trust perspective, state coercion, in the case of “YouStink” served to be counter-intuitive for elites as videos and graphic images emerged all over social media platforms, vilifying the Lebanese elites on a global scale.

Youth comprise a large part of the secular movement in Lebanon and universities are common ground for mobilization. As we saw in the above example from Outlook AUB, elites will coerce youth activists while they are at University (e.g. denied scholarships as a result of their activism). Creating logistical hurdles for youth in reaction to their activism is also quite ubiquitous, especially on university grounds since many post-secondary institutions are controlled or guided by sectarian political parties. Examples include preventing activist meetings, removing their promotional material from campus grounds, making their groups illegal and preventing them from organizing activities. An example that illustrates this type mobilization is the case of *Nahnoo*, an NGO and secular based university club from the Lebanese University, which attempts to promote secular thought across universities and across the country. From the time of their inception, sectarian based councils continually harassed them (Clark and Salloukh, 2013,

p. 742). According to Clark and Salloukh (2013), “This resistance usually came in the form of Hizbullah members’ ability to disturb an event—“the power of annoyance”—through individuals belonging to or loyal to the party, the party itself, or the council, or through pressure on the administration” (p. 742). As they further explain, members affiliated to Hezbollah resorted to various strategies, including “compelling students to boycott Nahnoo’s events; defacing or covering Nahnoo’s event posters or forbidding the hanging of its posters; reserving all available rooms on campus during a Nahnoo event to deny it a venue; or organizing a counter-event on the same day, time, and location of the Nahnoo event” (p. 742).

Elites have attempted to politicize student councils at various universities to control the student agenda and messaging throughout a university year. This instigates clashes between secularists and politically affiliated students on university grounds. This type of elite mobilization, where they attempt to control the university student bodies has resulted in various conflicts, clashes and even university closures.

In attempts to censor content, Lebanese elites have resorted to judicial means via defamatory law. This is evident in the Hisham Haddad case (mentioned above), a comedian who was accused of defaming politicians. According to Lama Fakhri (2014) from the Human Rights Watch, “Recent charges and prosecutions against news outlets, journalists and bloggers by Lebanese government officials reflect an urgent need to reform press and other laws to improve protection for freedom of expression” (Lama Fakhri, Human Rights Watch, 2014). Examples they highlight are: the sentencing of Jean Assi, a Lebanese blogger who was sentenced to two months in jail for supposedly

defaming former President Michel Suleiman, Mohammed Nazzal a journalist who was fined eighteen thousand dollars for supposedly criticizing the judicial system in Lebanon and journalist Rasha Abou Zaki was fined nearly three thousand dollars for defaming a former Prime Minister affiliated with March 14, Fouad Siniora (Lama Fakhri, Human Rights Watch, 2014).

The Use of Framing

Framing strategies constitute another major pattern through which sectarian elites have prevented secularist individuals and movements from rising and, in their views, threatening the sectarian nature of the consociational system. Let us first briefly explain what framing strategies are. They represent or depict a reality in a way that creates a sense of collective values amongst the targeted audience and increases the willingness to take action (either to defend or change a given structure). Frames are used to either sway people's already existing beliefs or instill new values in individuals to get them to think about a particular issue along specific lines and to act upon these beliefs (Brewer and Gross, 2005; Chong and Druckman, 2007; Jorg Matthes, 2012). It is thus in part, a psychological process whereby individuals decipher specific considerations and weigh the importance of that particular consideration relayed to them by legitimate and trustworthy figures (Druckman, 2001, p. 1043). According to Druckman (2001), "...people turn to elites for guidance and they are thus selective about which frames they believe – they only believe frames that come from sources they perceive to be credible" (p. 1045). The framing process can generate a greater sense of community as it coalesces people with similar thoughts on particular issues. Moreover, it can also impede people's

thought process, discouraging them from forming their own opinions (Brewer and Gross, 2005, p. 944).

Framing generally implies the use of discourses, symbols, or rhetoric. As Chong and Druckman (2007) explain, “Strong frames often rest on symbols, endorsements and links to partisanship and ideology, and may be effective in shaping opinions through heuristics rather than direct information about the substance of policy” (p. 111). The effectiveness of a frame is contingent on one’s existing belief system. We must add that from a framing perspective, divisive language can be especially effective if pre-existing beliefs align with the rhetoric. This aligns with Barker’s claims (2005) that “...some constructs are naturally more salient to particular individuals, based on how they mesh with that individual’s assumptions about the world works” (p. 377). Anti-secular messaging are constructs or frames that may or may not resonate with people in Lebanon, but are nonetheless effective in turning the general populace against secular people.

The framing strategies of sectarian elites are facilitated by the fact that the media landscape, through which much of the frames are communicated to the population, is mostly under the control of sectarian groups. In effect, though there exists many Lebanese outlets, almost all are affiliated with a sectarian party (e.g. Future TV is associated with the Sunni led March 14 coalition, Al Manar is affiliated with Shia sect and Hezbollah, Orange TV promotes the Maronite Free Patriotic Movement agenda and LBC is associated with another Maronite group, the Lebanese Forces). Sectarian elites have diffused their selected frames in part through the use of the media. As Dajani (2013) explains, “each medium operates as a voice for a political or sectarian faction, reinforcing

and encouraging divisions in society” (p. 1). The most prominent sectarian elites are intertwined within these outlets and frame messages to suit their vested interests. Since they control these media outlets, they control what issues are covered, alienate civil society groups who need access to mainstream media to thrive and produce their sectarian based stories against secular groups (Clark and Salloukh, 2013, 741).

To illustrate the monopoly of sectarian groups over the media landscape, Clark and Salloukh (2013) give the example of “a network of NGOs [which] conducted a campaign called the Popular Court, a mock court proceeding in which politicians were brought to trial for massacres committed during the civil war” (p. 741). But the subversive nature of this event was such that, “not one media outlet covered the launch of the Popular Court. Due to political pressure and to lack of funding and media attention, some NGOs withdrew from the event” (p. 741). The Popular Court campaign was denied access to mainstream media because they attempted to vilify past sectarian elites by associating them with crimes against humanity. To this effect, elites have successfully prevented the emergence of counter-discourses in the mainstream media landscape.

How then, have political-religious elites in Lebanon barred secular groups from political participation through framing strategies? First, a common frame is one whereby elites have defined themselves as the only protection against ‘*dangerous Others*’, as the only bastion protecting ‘our community’ against the others. It must be said that Lebanon’s disastrous Civil War facilitated this framing strategy, as the violence hardened sectarian cohesiveness and enticed inter-sectarian animosity. It thus made it easier for elites to frame themselves as essential safeguards for the communities they represent,

while supporting and reinforcing factional cohesiveness, in turn increasing solidarity amongst the various sectarian groups (Haddad, 2002, p. 297). Although a good number of Lebanese do not have a high sense of religiosity, meaning a small percentage of the population practice their religion relative to other Middle Eastern countries, religious sectarianism, reinforced by the atrocities of the Civil War, enables elites to play the sectarian card, not in the sense of religiosity but of a ‘collective we’ in need to be protected (Garde, 2012). They may make it appear as though their sect is at risk and they will protect it. Encouraging Lebanese citizens to vote based on sect rather than policies creates an “illusion that representatives of the same sect would aspire to guarantee the best conditions for their community and ensure their protection” (Maaroufi, 2014, p. 4). The existence of competing sects reinforces the elite’s frame, as it creates confrontation amongst the various religions, reaffirming the need for a strong leader in addition to forcing people of the same religion who are dependent on resources, to coalesce and support the sectarian elite in hopes of accessing resources (Ofeish, 1999, p. 100).

For Ofeish (1999), Lebanese elites will continuously reconfigure economic and political issues, and frame it as sectarian tension. Socioeconomic inequalities and power struggles between dominant and subaltern classes within the same sectarian community are concealed by elites who emphasize, through framing, the “threats” of the other sectarian communities. As a result of depicting this threat, elites reinforce the necessity of their role in guaranteeing the security of the community. Framing the problem as a sectarian struggle sways the population’s attention away from the corrupt reality towards the other sect and reinforces the elite’s legitimacy and necessity to protect the people’s sectarian identity.

In a similar vein, sectarian elites have adroitly framed secularism as nothing less than ‘Atheism’. This ‘Secularism= Atheism’ frame is quite powerful, knowing that in Lebanon as well as in most of the Middle East (and elsewhere), atheism is viewed quite negatively by most, thereby undermining any legitimacy to the secular movement (Grafton, 2002, p. 32). In that sense, they use a “Jacobist” lens when interpreting secularism and associate it with the loss of religious freedom that occurred throughout the French Revolution (Grafton, 2002, p. 42). Consequently, secularists are depicted as quite dangerous threats to confessional groups, ‘Jacobists’ whose sole goal is to physically eliminate religion from the social and political landscape. In doing so, secularists, who could have simply been legitimate ‘political adversaries’, now become ‘enemies’ who should not be given any space in the country.

3.3 Cracks in the Sectarian Consociational Model: Social Media and Secularist Challenges

Though our research has demonstrated the various strategies employed by sectarian elites to protect the consociational model, it would be important to highlight, even briefly, some forms of resistance that secularists have displayed recently against the sectarian elites. We will learn that social media facilitates this secular resistance. In effect, according to a 2015 report published by TNS Arab Social Media Influencers Summit (2015), social media use is very high in Lebanon, including WhatsApp messenger, Facebook and YouTube, which are amongst the highest in the region (p. 21). All these platforms have a high sense of virality, meaning they are tools that depict events through images and videos and have the ability to spread rapidly through various

networks to a large cohort of people around the world. Since the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and after the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war, blogging also became a popular tool especially among the youth in Lebanon (Riegert and Ramsay, 2012, p. 288). According to Khalil (2017), “In the 2000’s, the emergence of blogging, video-sharing platforms and social media increased the quantity and diversified the quality of participatory media” (p. 704).

A first wave of protest came with the *Laique Pride* movement, a secular organization that emerged in 2010, used Facebook to promote secular change (Meier, 2015, p. 181). Their objective was remodeling the consociational system through electoral reform, increased social justice and the eradication of corruption (p. 181). According to Meier (2015), “The first gathering originated on Facebook with talks among activists to promote a secular change in Lebanon, focusing on a claim for secular law for personal status, including marriages” (p. 181). TBP, a group that attempted but failed to gain seats in parliament by providing a secular option to Lebanese citizens, were also heavy users of social media. Maaroufi (2014) indicates that TBP used social media effectively: “Through social media the movement managed progressively to make a name for itself and present its political programme” (p. 3). They managed to reach out to a diverse audience using the Internet and social media, especially Facebook (p. 17). In 2010, when *Laique Pride* and TBP emerged and attempted to use social media, they were successful in organizing meetings and in gathering large groups of people to reform the consociational model, but it is important to consider that at that time, social media was not as sophisticated as it was throughout the “YouStink” movement in the summer of 2015. By 2015, after the Arab Spring, social media had become more sophisticated

providing activists a wide array and effective options to get their message out.

In effect, the “YouStink” protests in 2015 really illustrated the breadth of social media, through its reach to a diverse audience, within and outside Lebanon, and the depth, as activists used it continually to get their message across. Throughout the “YouStink” protests, activists posted comments on social media about police brutality, posted graphic videos and images on the run (as it was happening) onto social media, hosted NGO representatives speaking against the violations towards youth and finally depicted interviews and first-hand accounts of children and activists on social media (Khalil, 2017, p. 706). Khalil (2017) states the following: “In addition to a large number of designs, pictures and videos that went viral, the language of #YouStink as a non-violent disobedience movement attracted a number of young artists/activists to voice their concerns” (p. 708). The reliance on hash tags, videos and images as we see in Khalil (2017), proved effective for the movement. The repetition of the “YouStink” hash tag in addition to the prominence of the “YouStink” logo and several mottos on social media resonated with the Lebanese people and got the message across. According to Kraidy (2016), “One of the movement’s mottos, “kellon ya'ny kellon”—“all of them means all of them”—was a rallying cry, expressed on the street, on social media, and during press conferences...” (p. 22). Furthermore an article published by CTV News, at the time, identified that social media served to be the most “electrifying” tool (Sarah El Deeb, CTV News, 2015). El Deeb (2015) stated the following: “...the most electrifying move by the young, tech-savvy group of activists was when they spread their catchy slogan “You Stink” across social media” (El Deeb, 2015).

The use of satire, humor and mockery served and continues to serve as a mobilization strategy for Lebanese activists. Humor in Lebanese blogs is quite eminent. Referring to Lebanon, “In societies where there is censorship or strong norms and taboos about what can be said in public, humor may have a special place. While Lebanon has a long history of political satire, Qifa Nabki note they were common fare on television and talk shows in Lebanon in the 1990s” (Riegert and Ramsay, 2012, p. 297). In the “YouStink” protests, satire was used to mock politicians and demand changes. For example, the use of satirical songs such as “‘Kellon Yaane Kellon’ (‘All of them means all of them’) by Al-Rahel Al-Kabir (2015) and Xriss Jor’s (2015) cover of Michael Jackson’s ‘Care about us’” were shared and used to get the message across in unconventional ways (Khalil, 2017, p. 708).

They used symbolism to amplify their message and utilized mockery/humor to make a joke of and delegitimize the elite and the state (Kraidy, 2016). They took and owned the garbage crisis, framed it using public discourse and presented it to the Lebanese and on the international stage for public scrutiny (Kraidy, 2016, p. 23). As Kraidy (2016) further argues, “Symbolically and metaphorically, then, a key contribution of the “You Stink” movement was to make this political rot hyper-visible by not only investing into the symbolic capital of garbage with its tropes of putrefaction, odor, dirt, nausea, disease, corruption, but by insisting on a notion of citizenship grounded in a body politic imagined to be non-sectarian and subject to the rule of law” (p 22).

This movement also relied on youth and children throughout the protests. Children were interviewed alongside their parents, to amplify their future vulnerability in

light of the status quo (Khalil, 2017, p. 709). These interviews and their images were circulated on social media. As Khalil argues, “One of the recurring themes is concern for the future, particularly as it relates to the ability to provide a safe and secure environment for children. This appeared in the movement’s press statements and interviews as well as their Facebook posts and tweets” (p. 708).

Conclusion

The sense of frustration is widespread: “In Lebanon, one often hears metaphorical statements of despair along the lines of *ma ba’a bidn a siy ase* (we don’t want politics anymore) and *kil hal siy asewa-hal siy asiy in mitl ba’d. a* (all this politics and these politicians are the same)” (Hermez, 2015, 507). There is a sense of hopelessness where people know that the political system won’t change but act as if they are unaware and although they admit the sectarian nature of the system, they continue to engage in politics nonetheless (p. 517-518). This has become reality for many Lebanese, as they have lost hope and simply accept the status-quo to survive. Moreover, there has been a surge in secularist mobilization against this reality, most recently illustrated with the 2015 “YouStink” protests.

Conosociationalism is a political model meant for heterogeneous societies. It aims to achieve balanced political representation equally amongst all factions existing within a state. It is elite-centric, as it ensures all power is provided to elites who represent various subcultures within the country (Lijphart, 2008, p. 31-32). When the consociational model was applied in Lebanon the intention was to ensure a heterogeneous society would share power peacefully and equally. Although it successfully divided power among the various

homogenous factions, it soon proved to be too elitist in the sense that it provided too much power to the religious elites, failed to integrate the non-religious, and miscalculated the complex nature of sectarianism in Lebanon. This resulted in the alienation of various groups including secularists.

The main argument this paper offered is that the consociational system in Lebanon has fostered an environment where political-religious elites mobilize by co-opting emerging civil society groups, by framing their role as vital for the stability and well-being of the country in an unstable environment, suppressing activism and dissent, maintaining a strong clientele of voters by means of bribes and employment, and by controlling the media and framing messages.

Although there lacks an answer to the major problem related to the consociational model, several scholars have either proposed a potential solution or have provided advice on approaching the fragile situation. For example, Vanessa Shields (2008) argues that compromise and flexible accommodating political structures provide the best chance for long-lasting peace in Lebanon (p. 485). For her change should be gradual: “Any move at prematurely ‘de-confessionalising’ Lebanon, for instance by pursuing a ‘one man, one vote’ system, would be highly beneficial to some parties, such as Hezbollah, but it could also be a disaster as some traditionally powerful political elites would lose their seats. Instead a more gradual approach is needed” (p. 484). Salamey (2009) is more prescriptive, and calls for significant changes. He proposes an integrative form of consociationalism where self-determination is an element alongside pre-determination making confessional group membership optional and inviting non-sectarian members to

join (p. 95). According to Salamey (2009) “At least four important institutional arrangements can be formulated along integrative consociational principles: bicameralism, duality of administrative local and national governance, mixed electoral system, and crosscutting electoral districting” (p. 95).

Paul Dixon (2012), who critiques both reformists and consociationalists, does not offer a solution but rather advises on changing the way we approach the situation. His constructivist approach aims to interpret the conflict as a first step, and then look at solutions and how change can be achieved in a desirable manner rather than depending on the situation at hand (p. 108). He prefers this flexible and analytical method to choosing between consociationalism and reform. McCulloch (2014) simply prefers liberal consociationalism to the corporate form.

This paper does not offer a solution for Lebanon. Rather, it analyzes and depicts the consequences of confessional power sharing. It provides insight enticing one to delve deeper into the elite and activist’s mind in Lebanon to acquire further detail on why they mobilize the way they do. This may offer an initial base and inform future graduate fieldwork on this issue in Lebanon.

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