Women's Wings in Political Parties:
A Mechanism to Marginalize Women or to
Empower them[1]

Fatima Kassem

Introduction

Gender inequality is a pervasive global **phenomenon, particularly in the political sphere. Previous scholarship sought explanations for the low female representation in countries' development levels, political regimes and/or electoral systems, as well as within societies' religious and cultural value systems. Though arguments, singularly or combined, may broadly explain and predict female representation in legislative bodies in countries of different income levels and varied political systems, they** sometimes overlook observed variations in middle income **countries and fail to explain** the presence **of over**achievers and underachievers, within societies of the same religious family, or in parties within the same country. This article offers an explanation **of** female political representation, **regardless of variations** in the inner structure and specific characteristics of political parties.

Why political parties? This paper presupposes that political parties are the main vehicles of women's political leadership. They are bodies **that** recruit, promote, select and nominate women - and men - to leadership positions. However, different parties offer women different opportunities and challenges. I shall argue that as party religiosity increases, women's chances for leadership fall, where party religiosity is the extent to which religious goals penetrate political platforms. Womens political leadership refers to **their**

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access to decision-making bodies and the inner structures of political parties, including parties' women wings. This is especially relevant for studying female representation in leadership positions within parties that maintain women's wings compared to those that do not.

Women's wings are frequently seen by feminists as marginalizing women instead of enhancing their prospects for leadership. This is reflected in the low female representation in leadership positions and her intangible influence in the decision-making process within political parties. This research explores whether women's wings marginalize and' «ghettoize'» women or empower them. In examining these opposing views, I also look for positive - albeit unintended or even counterintuitive - consequences that may emanate from ghettoizing women in special women's wings. The findings may indeed be contrary to the negative **anticipations** of feminists who embrace the gender paradigm and advocate gender mainstreaming for gender equality. **This article also** departs from prior scholarship that considers women's wings as totally «women unfriendly» by showing some positive consequences of marginalization.

I shall take Lebanon as a single country case-study. Lebanon's mosaic and diverse society of 18 religious communities is marked with multiple cross-cutting social and religious cleavages that shape and structure its political and party systems. Its multiparty system is composed of diverse types of powerful religious and not so religious political parties that vie for power, control, and for electoral prowess. Thus Lebanese political parties offer a useful case study for exploring the pros and cons of women's wings for women's leadership. This depends upon the intensity of religiosity, pluralism in membership and democratic practices in operating procedures of parties that maintain women's wings. The structural aspects, the very'nature of the Lebanese political system reflected in political parties' - combined with a mix of socio-economic and cultural factors' - might account, to some degree, for the constraints and barriers faced by women who seek political leadership. By privileging confessional-identified actors and constituencies, some political institutions give religious and conservative cultural values a backdoor entry, erecting an indirect barrier to women's presence. Those values are incorporated'into the political skeleton of confessional-defined political parties and' wield their influence from there. This is exacerbated under conditions of conflict or in post-conflict **situations**. This paper attempts to explain the counter-intuitive claim relating to women's wings

within political parties concerning women's chances in assuming leadership positions therein.

The findings of the field research generally support the argument that women's wings in parties of higher religiosity, lesser pluralism, and deficits in democratic process are more likely to' ghettoize' women - thus barring them from leadership positions - than parties with more secular platforms. Nonetheless, the findings also show that marginalization leads to frustrations which produce positive' - unintended consequences – for women's leadership.

The article proceeds in three sections in addition to the introductory and concluding statements. Section A offers the background and research methodology. Section B provides an overview of the structure of the multiparty system in Lebanon and a generic classification thereof by party religiosity. Section C focuses on the forms, functions and roles of women's wings in the various political parties. It provides answers to the main research question of whether women's wings marginalize or empower women.

A. Research Methodology

Accurate and reliable data on women in political parties are rare and, when available, are often obsolete[1]. The paucity of research on women in parties and related sex-disaggregated data is highlighted in official reports and by researchers and scholars[2]. Scholars also criticize the failure of political scientists to engender their research and address the political participation of women (Shtay, 2004: 143-144). Given this, an original data set on women in political parties was compiled from party administrators. To my knowledge, the data set is unique in its

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(1)   Only rough estimates are available on female party membership in some indus-
      trialized countries dating back to the last century (Lane and Ersson, 1987). In the
      Arab countries, female party membership is estimated at 10% in Egypt, 2% in
      Yemen, and 7-8% in Lebanon. (Shtay, 2004: 144).

(2)   National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), Lebanese Report on Im-
      plementation of the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination
      against Women (CEDAW), 2006 (Lebanese Republic, Beirut) p.50; and 2004
      (Lebanese Republic: Beirut), p. 55. See also, Fatima Sbaity Kassem. 2005b. «The
      Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Arab
      Countries» (YWCA: Beirut).

coverage, scope and quality. Membership and composition of decision-making bodies in parties are dynamic, especially in parties that pursue due democratic process. Therefore, such data must be continuously updated.

This field research was conducted in Lebanon during 2006' - 2009 Statistics on women in parties were updated and are valid as at the end 2010. This research focused on the Lebanese multiparty system which includes around 80 active parties. However, only 18 of these parties were considered' relevant' to purposes of this research[1]. Combined, these 18 relevant parties account for over 70% of the 128-seat parliament, with each party occupying at least one seat (0.8%) in any of the five post-war parliaments (1992, 1996, 2000, 2005, and 2009).

Based on a set of questionnaires, information was culled from 150 structured and semi-structured or free-flowing interviews with party leaders and their senior advisers, party administrators, female party activists, officials, and members of parliament (MPs) and **ministers in the** government?[2]The author personally conducted all interviews with the following: (1) Fourteen party leaders, four of whom were clergymen and religious leaders, and senior

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(1) According to Giovanni Sartori, relevant parties are those that occupy at least 3 per-
     cent of seats in the legislature (Sartori, 1976: 122-23). However, in order to get more
     observations, the threshold is lowered to one seat out of 128 in any of the post-war
     parliaments (1992, 1996, 2000, 2005 and 2009). The relevant political parties include
     the Communist of Lebanon, Syrian Social National (Qawmi Suri), Phalanges (Ka-
     taéb), National Bloc (Qutlah), Arab Renaissance Socialist of Lebanon (Baath), Pro-
     gressive Socialist (Taqaddumi Ishtiraki), National Liberals (Ahrar), Islamic Group
     (Jamaa Islamiah) , Hope Movement (Amal), Unitarian Movement (Tawhid), Party
     of God (Hizbullah), Waad, Democratic Renewal (Tajaddod), Free Patriotic Move-
     ment (Tayyar Watani Hurr), Lebanese Forces (Quwwat), Islamic Action Front
     (Jabhat Al-Amal), Future Movement (Al-Mustqbal), and Giants (Marada). See An-
     nex Table on political parties and coding of party-level characteristics.
(2) All interviews were conducted in Arabic and audio-taped by permission of respon-
     dents. These were translated into English by the author and are unedited. As per
     the code of conduct for field research conducted under the auspices of Columbia
     University, anonymity must be maintained. Therefore, the names of interviewees
     are not provided, but only the position of the interviewee and the generic type of
     the party. However, identities are sometimes retained when given in citations.

male advisers to these party leaders; (2) six female MPs in the 2005 parliament, and three out of the four ever female cabinet ministers; (3) the majority of women in leadership positions in parties' decision-making bodies, including two party leaders, one vice-president and two secretary-generals; (4) all current and former heads of women's wings in 13 (out of 18) parties that house such wings[1]; and (5) Fourteen (2.5%) of all female municipal candidates who were on parties' electoral lists. In general, party leaders and/or their senior advisers selected and referred me directly to female party officials. Most of the women interviewed are in leadership positions, activists and politically informed, educated and professionals (lawyers, physicians, architects, engineers), career and business women, or scholars and university professors. Although those highly profiled interviewed women are not the whole universe of women in leadership positions, nonetheless they are a good representative sample. This lends credence to the information they provided and substantiates the findings of this research.

Notwithstanding the above, this was not an easy or smooth task, given the political instability and stringent conditions set by religious parties for granting interviews. I had to submit pro-forma applications specifying the name or position of party official to be interviewed, purpose of research, list of questions, personal data with affiliation and official letters of introduction. Generally, female officials in extremist and conservative religious parties had to obtain prior permission from party leadership for the interview. Given the high security alert especially after the July 2006 war on Lebanon, interviews with top ranking officials were difficult to schedule and/or conducted by phone. Sometimes, interviews with female officials were not granted because, according to party elites, they were socially but not politically involved. Appointments with party leaders were extremely difficult, unless secured through personal networks and referrals or «*wasta*» (**personal favor due to contacts**). This was especially true during the research period owing to the explosive security situation and attendant political concerns preoccupying politicians to be interviewed. Meetings were held

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(1)   The five parties that do not maintain womens wings are the Arab Renaissance Socialist of Lebanon (Ba'ath), National Bloc (Kutlah), National Liberals (Ahrar), Democratic (Wa'ad), and Democratic Renewal (Tajaddod).

under very tight security measures in fortified parliamentary offices, at party headquarters, private homes in remote areas, hotel rooms, or other safe havens. This was necessary as many of the interviewees were at risk of assassination during that critical period[1].

The rich information gleaned from interviews provided insight on the role of party variation in political culture on women's leadership and on the attitude of party elites vis-à-vis women's leadership[2]. Political culture is usually reflected in the role that women's wings play in promoting or marginalizing women within political parties that maintain such entities in comparison with those without such wings. The following section justifies the relevance of political parties for women's advancement and leadership opportunities and the role that women's wings play towards that end.

B. Why Political Parties?

Are political parties the veritable forklifts for women's leadership as many students of political parties argue? Which party-related variables are women-friendly for leadership? Can women's wings marginalize and simultaneously empower women? These are the research questions for which answers are sought.

The views of party leaders and female party activists are gauged on a basic assumption upon which this research is premised, namely,' «Are political parties the main vehicle for women's political leadership?»The majority of my interlocutors supported the central role that parties play in promoting women's leadership, while few others expressed dissenting views. A five-time

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(1) Preliminary interviews were held during September-October 2006, immediately following the 33-day Israeli invasion of Lebanon in July 2006. These were followed by three rounds of structured and semi-structured interviews in December 2007- January 2008, March-April and July-December 2008; and concluded in June-September 2009. The interviews were interrupted during 2007 and 2008 because of frequent eruptions of fighting in camps, street fighting or closures of downtown Beirut. The situation somewhat stabilized in October 2008 pursuant to the election of the President. It remains volatile to date.

(2) Following Norris and Inglehart (1993) in comparing egalitarian to traditional parties, they refer to political culture as the dominant set of values, norms, and attitudes vis-à-vis women.

elected female MP and a **one-time** cabinet minister maintain**ed** that there is no magic formula for women's leadership. Nonetheless,

> Only political parties can offer women leadership positions. Running as independents is not a formula for success. However, women should build alliances with their male colleagues in political parties in order to convince decision-makers to introduce affirmative action policies. Political expertise is not a degree that one gets, but is acquired overtime. At the end of the day, women will be recognized by their presence as leaders.

This echoes the argument that', «...,the only way that (*political*) institutions will change is through the politics of their (*women's*) presence'» (Anne Phillips, 1995, in Duerst-Lahti, 2006:10). However, Amrita Basu (2005) expresses **reservations concerning parties' being** particularly conducive to women's leadership, a view shared by a religious party leader **who said**:

> It is not a question of whether or not political parties offer women chances in leadership, but whether women impose their presence in politics. Unfortunately, no wom**a**n did. **In the Asian Muslim, as well as in western, countries** women imposed themselves and proved that they are good politicians. But, in the Arab countries neither women nor men have a great opportunity in politics. This relates to basic human rights and is not a gender issue.

Few scholars advocate that women's movements are an alternative to political parties, unless they build alliances with political parties and have leverage as pressure groups (Basu 2005). Others suggest that women **should** establish all-female parties emulating the few in the USA, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Jordan, and Syria, among others. However, the experience of all-female parties is not altogether encouraging. Such exclusively female parties marginalize women instead of advancing them, **an outcome** which feminists would undoubtedly argue against. Indeed, women need to work with the flow and not oppose it.

Scholars also maintain that women's opportunities for leadership depend on the **relevant party's** strength, as measured by the number of seats **it occupies** in parliament (Lane and Ersson 1987). The strength **of a political party** will eventually determine how much risk the party is willing to undertake by nominating women on their electoral lists. Thus, if parties are strong they can

afford to nominate women for public office **and would be more willing** to promote them to leadership positions. Powerful parties have less to lose than weaker parties by nominating women to public office. **It is clear that** women stand a much better chance of winning in elections if they run within an electoral list of a strong **party than in that of a** weaker **party. With** few dissenting views proposing alternatives, the assumption that political parties are main vehicles for women's leadership is supported and widely documented in scholarly and feminist literature.

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the multiparty system in Lebanon**:**

«Lebanon is a mix of fabrics, sects, convictions, contradictions, cleavages, and communities. Political parties are but a reflection of this society'» **is the apt description of one** party leader, **referring to the** multi-religious fabric of society marked by a multiparty system form**ed** around multiple social cleavages. Scholars note that social cleavages shape and structure a party system and reflect the degree of society's cohesiveness and homogeneity (Almond and Verba 1965, Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Lane and Ersson 1987)[1]. Political parties form**ed** around these cleavages mark how closely they are linked to local communities and to the society at large, and explain how they function within these segmented societies. However, these scholars also argue that such cleavages are central for a meaningful functioning of democracies and for party competition (Almond and Verba 1965, Dahl 1965 and 1982). In Lebanon, these cleavages are reflected in some 80 active and diverse types of parties, but with 18' «relevant'» parties competing and vying for power and control[2]. The diversity and profusion in the

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(1) Cleavages may be segmental like racial, linguistic, and religious (Eckstein: 1966). They may be cultural (young-old, urban-rural, traditional-modern, authoritarian-libertarian), or socio-economic as in class, status, role, and gender (Flanagan, 1963:64). Eckstein (1966) lists sex, tribe, race, region, rural-urban, young-old, language, religion, as well as differences in values, norms, and belief systems, as social cleavages (in Lane and Ersson, 1987:41).

(2) The impact of social cleavages is depicted by measuring the strength or fragmentation of the party system. Laakso and Taagepera develo**ped** an index for the «effective» number of parties within a party system, which takes into account their =

multiparty system has been recognized by politicians, clergymen, scholars and political scientists studying the roots of political instability and perpetual conflict in the country[1]. In this vein, a Lebanese scholar remarks that,

> ...[T]he most apparent characteristic of the Lebanese party-system is diversity in features, multiplicity in numbers and complexity in classification. The party-system is endowed with many parties with differences and disparities in their inner workings, organizational structures, and ideologies. (Shtay, 2004: 130)

=   relative size and measures their strength in terms of the proportion of seats they occupy in the legislature.? They suggest that, «The number of effective parties is the number of hypothetical *equal-size* parties that would have the same total *effect* on fractionalization of the system as have equal parties of *unequal size*. (1979:2). The Lebanese parliament is effectively a 4.9 party system with a fractionalization index of 0.94, which is borderline high, since anything above 5.0 is high (1979: 24). This reflects wide disparities in relative sizes and strengths of parties as only a handful of the 18 relevant parties wield power. It also reveals a high degree of fragmentation permeating the Lebanese legislature, as a result of the multi-social and religious cleavages. The effective number of parties is calculated by dividing one by the sum of squares of shares occupied by the relevant parties (i.e. occupying at least 1% of seats in current parliament): $N_s = 1/\sum p2$. The fractionalization index is the complement of the number of effective parties, calculated as $1-1/N$. (1979: 8, 24). The number of parties equals the effective number of parties only when all parties have equal strength. In other cases, the effective number of parties is lower than their actual number. For instance, the number of effective parties is (2.1) in India, (2.4) in Austria, (3.2) in Germany, (3.6) in Israel, (3.8) in the Netherlands, (3.9) in Italy and (7.0) in Belgium (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 181-182).

(1)   See also, Mohamad Sha'ya, 2006, «Why are we divided when faced with existential questions»? (An-Nahar, August 31, 2006); Patriarch Georges Khodr, «Lebanese politics and the Clergymen» (An.Nahar May 3, 2008); Former Prime Minister Salim El-Hoss, 2008, «We are all Sectarian» (As-Safir, June 24, 2008); Sami Efeish, 2006 «Confessional imbalance ensures instability in Lebanon» (An-Nahar, September 18, 2006); Raghid El-Solh, «Consociational Democracy in Lebanon: Competition or Consensus» 2008 (Isam Fares Center for Lebanon, Beirut); Mas'oud El-Daher, «Towards a serious confrontation with sectarian discourse in Lebanon» (As Safir, April 26, 2008).

The Lebanese multiparty system **includes** a handful of powerful parties and several minor ones that do not stand a chance unless they join political blocs and coalitions for electioneering purposes. The majority of parties in Lebanon are confessional, single-sect dominated, with civil, national, and/or religious orientations. They rally around leaders from the same dominant sect and few have plural membership. Their labels vary depending on self-definition, **geographic affiliation**, declared objectives and programmatic orientations. These parties may not fully conform to the standards or classical features and common nuances and norms of parties in as far as institutionalization, **adherence to ideologies**, and/or the mixture of religious and secular components in their political platforms. The intensity of religiosity and degree of secularism of these parties is **indicated** by examining their political platforms and by determining the extent to which religious and secular components penetrate their agendas. However, one finds across the party-system in Lebanon not only multiple religiosities but also multiple secularisms[1]. For instance, a female activist notes that,' «We established non-denominational kindergartens, as models for children in the South. These were approved by Hizbullah, which indicates that even in the most religious parties, one finds secularist tendencies». This **is a testimony about** the prevalence of multiple secularisms and religiosities in Lebanon. It also demonstrates that efforts continue to be **exerted in order** to bridge religious cleavages in Lebanon.

Some confessional parties maintain a religious denominational identity but declare non-religious objectives, while pushing for civil goals and national sovereignty. They generally lack a political ideology per se and their outreach ranges from limited territorial to less than wide national control. In this sense,

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(1) Indeed, the resurgence of a rich debate on the sacred and secular recognized the fluidity of the relationship and highlights the persistence, permanence, centrality and complexity of religiosity in secular lives. The theory that secularism will over-take religiosity with the advent of modernism in industrial and post-industrial so-cieties is being called into question. Social scientists are revisiting theories of secularisms and religiosities, and their connection with the socio-political and cul-tural spheres. See, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press); Alfred Stepan, 2009. «Multiple Secularisms», Seminar No. 593, New Delhi; pp. 108-119.

parties in Lebanon may look after the interests of one of the 18 religious communities, but not after the whole population with its multi-denomina-tional affiliations. This aggregation of confessional parties is what makes up the Lebanese Republic. **A party leader states that:**

> Lebanon is a confederation of 18 religious communities, each concerned with its own identity and survival as enclaves. It is a federation of minorities that govern by proportional confessional representation within a consociational political system. Unlike other Arab countries, Lebanon is a civil and secular not a religious state. It boasts a tolerant constitution stipulating freedom of religious convictions, expression and practices.

In this connection, **a** leader of **a** Maronite-dominated party points out that', «...the confessional quota reveals the importance of religion in society. It governs the social and public life as well as political and party systems». This testimony is substantively significant in that religion and politics in Lebanon are intertwined with no evidence of clear separation between the two.

Beyond the confessional identity which brings the constituents together, the locomotive or driving force behind the formation of political parties lies in self-serving interests of political leaders for electoral power, patronage, and client**alis**m. Feudal or' «rentier»' type client**alis**tic behavior keeps the party in the political arena, as the leader uses his affluence for vote-buying or offering financial and in-kind incentives to secure higher voter turnout. In this respect, capitalizing on a common confessional identity for electoral purposes is a classic case in political parties – and not *sui generis* to Lebanon, as scholars point out that,' «One's religious identity provided a cue that oriented voters toward political parties, and helped define one's ideological position on the political spectrum». (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 228).

Based on information gathered from party leaders and administrators as well as **the** observations of national scholars, most political parties remain tools in the hands of their leaders. This may be a cause for alarm regarding the democratic process in parties' operating procedures. Democratic deficits are prevalent in leadership transfers and in decision-making processes. Leadership becomes a legacy as it is passed on to a family member, often a male. Democratic practices are also compromised when hierarchical and obsolete mechanisms lead to concentration of decision-making in the hands of few

party elites. The fact that the majority of political parties suffer from autocratic leadership and democratic deficits does not augur well for women's chances in political leadership. In contrast, in the case of parties with secular platforms and leftist orientations, religion is often confined to the private sphere. Their specific, **sometimes imported**, ideologies guide their mission statements and political agendas. These parties enjoy plural membership, hold periodic competitive elections to transfer leadership, and employ decentralization in the decision-making processes. In parties with lower religiosity, plural member- ship and democratic operating procedures I believe women's wings' - if maintained' - promote and empower women and create a critical mass for leadership.

Further, there are parties that uphold the Islamic Shari'a in their political platforms and use politics to achieve religious and politico-religious goals. These may vary in line with the intensity of religiosity in their political agendas. The relationship between the state and religious leadership ebbs and flows, as a party leader explains that: «The multi-religious composition of society is not the major problem. It is the implicit understanding between strong religious leaders and a weak state to maintain the status quo because it is in their mutual interest»[1]. In this vein, Deniz Kandiyoti points out that, «In Lebanon, where the state incorporated the religious/ethnic heterogeneity of society in its formal structure, the government relinquished matters of family and personal status to religious authorities of the various communities». (1991:12). Another researcher finds that, «...in {religiously pluralist systems, like Lebanon, Palestine and to a lesser extent Israel, religious leaders often institutionalize traditional norms and values which, ...are often contrary to gender equality...» (Bouhamdan, 2009:18).

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(1)   The Jonathan Fox Religion and State (RAS) index on religion-state regulation assigns a high score of 22 to Lebanon, equivalent to that of France and India (Kunkler: 2009). This high level of cooperation between the state and religious authorities begs the question of whether such cooperation is attained consciously through efforts of the willing, or the government is coerced into accepting the sta- tus quo in order to ensure stability and security. The political situation in Leba- non is in continuous flux. There is a lot of muscle-flexing and «not-so-peaceful» status as the July 2006, June 2007, and May 2008 events demonstrate.

Therefore, such implicit cooperation-cooptation between religious leaders and the state may not be' women-friendly'. This relationship does not enhance women's chances in leadership via women's wings, since religious leaders' - particularly if they double as party leaders – have the upper hand in deciding the station and lives of women. Women's chances in leadership are limited overall, but I argue that they are infinitesimal in parties whose leaders are clerics, whose platforms contain expanse religious components, and in which women's wings effectively and strictly segregate female from male members. Indeed, parties with religious platforms in which women's wings are fully segregated occupy around one-fifth of parliamentary seats **of** the 2009 parliament. These MPs are all-male. This is an indicator of women's limited chances of leadership in religious parties, that reflects how marginalizing to women confining them within segregated women's wings would be.

Notwithstanding these observations, information gathered from interviewees reveals that religious leaders of Muslim-oriented parties, like other party leaders, will support women's leadership when *it is in their interest to do so*. For instance, in the Jordanian 2003 elections, extremist religious parties included women in their electoral list because of voter turnout. They obtained a «fatwa» from religious leaders that this does not violate the principle of «*Wilayah*» that women cannot lead men. In Lebanon, a conservative religious party did not oppose the proposal for a parliamentary quota for **women, because it was proposed and supported by** their staunch allies. Another party appointed six women in its decision-making bodies **in order** to attract female voters during elections. But in such instances one is hard pressed to stress that it is common for parties to employ' strategic maneuverings[5] in this case supporting women's leadership, if it is in their interests to do so (Clark and Schwedler, 2003). In this connection, Mervat Hatem argues that,' «While Islamists are not at all committed to the liberal process; secularists are only committed to it if liberalization does not dislodge them from their position of power».' (1994:676) Therefore, women aspiring to leadership must identify where parties' interests lie and strategize accordingly;

To sum up, I look at the Lebanese multiparty system through the lens of social and religious cleavages and impact of a 15-year civil war, producing an extraordinary profusion of parties with multiple religiosities and secularisms.

Information from interviewees, content analysis of charters, agendas and mission statements, review of literature, and consultation with students of the Lebanese multiparty system guided the complex process of classification. Parties are classified according to the intensity of' religiosity' on their political platforms or the extent to which religious goals penetrate their agendas. This produced five generic categories of political parties, which are placed along a religiosity continuum from highest religiosity (score 1 or lowest secularism) to lowest religiosity (score 5 or highest secularism). These comprise parties of extremist religiosity, conservative but not extremist religiosity, tolerant religiosity; and parties of confessional membership but civil-secular goals (thereafter civil-confessional), and those that are a-religious with secular platforms.

The following section addresses the role and functions of women's wings, and their effectiveness in mobilizing women and creating a critical mass for leadership. The findings show that while women's wings are essentially mechanisms that marginalize women, nonetheless they also elicit some positive outcomes' - unintended consequences' - that may emerge to empower them. These counterintuitive findings are more often than not influenced by party-related characteristics, especially party religiosity, plural membership and democratic practices.

C. Women's Wings

Political parties have employed various tools as avenues to mobilize and recruit women. These include doctrinal (religious) and ideological **mobilization**, financial and in-kind incentives as well as women's wings to attract members, especially the poor and deprived

Women's wings are the arms of political parties and a central mechanism for mobilizing women. The functions, forms and goals for which women's wings are established do not vary much across parties. These units are generally engaged in functions like fund-raising, organizing social events, and providing welfare and social services to poor families in specific communities. Women's wings are either set-up within parties' inner structures or externally as autonomous, parallel women's organizations (NGOs). **Some** scholars argue that, «...the introduction of separate, «parallel» women's sectors reflects the efforts of party leaders to ghettoize women's activities rather than envision

meaningful gender equality within the party». (Janine Clark and Jillian Schwedler, 2003: 302). Similarly, Amrita Basu maintains that,

> Most political parties have women's wings that mobilize women to vote during elections. Whether, these increase women's involvement with party politics is another matter. Women's wings allow parties to' «ghettoize» women and women's issues; ...Even when parties have neglected women's interests, they have profited from employing gendered imagery, drawing on women's votes and using women in electioneering. (2005: 14, 33)

This is analogous to the description of women's wings in the early European parties **where**:

> ...[T]hese sections were peripheral to the power structure of the party and did not provide a route for women into positions of political influence.~ since positions of influence in parties were scarce, parties did not want to make it easy for women to enter these positions. This would have created conflict with the existing hierarchies, and that conflict could be avoided by admitting women only as' second-class participants'.~ because they were usually denied positions of influence, women had little incentive to become involved in parties. (Alan Ware, 1996: 81)

Indeed, these arguments point to the marginalization of women via segregating them within the confines of these special units and treating them as second-class party members.

From my vantage point, I find that women's wings are useful in the short-term as temporary mechanisms for placing women's issues on **party agendas** and lobbying for higher representation in leadership positions. The effectiveness of these wings is enhanced only when they are supported by enlightened, progressive and 'women-friendly' party elites, led at the highest levels and not by junior officials, and share in the decision-making processes[1]. However, more often than not, this is not the case. In order to examine the effectiveness of women's wings, I look at their role in expanding female membership, amassing the female

(1)   See: Fatima Sbaity Kassem, 2005. «*Beijing + 10: Arab Women at a Glance Achievements, Gaps and Challenges*», (Woodrow Wilson Centre for Scholars: Washington DC).

vote, and creating a critical mass of women for leadership. **These ghettoizing** units may also produce positive outcomes that empower women.

Information gleaned from interviewees point to a significant role that women's wings play in raising female party membership and amassing female votes but not in enhancing their chances for leadership. Parties establish women's wings as recruitment mechanisms, but as importantly – albeit implicitly– as electioneering machineries to amass the female vote. The extent **of their effectiveness** is dependent upon the salient features of the parties that maintain them, **particularly on the** intensity of religiosity in their political platforms, as well **as on pluralism** in membership and democratic practices.

In the pre-war era, the feminist discourse attracted women to join secular parties with leftist orientations. This was largely accomplished via women's wings. At that time, women's wings in parties with lowest religiosity had a positive impact on empowering women and enhancing their political education and maturity. During the civil war, militarization and violence drove away many women from parties. Women turned to relief work and focused on welfare and survival. Some also assumed new quasi-political roles within the more modern and progressive post-war parties. This included lobbying for women's rights, elimination of discrimination, and gender equality. These roles are comparable to those that women assumed in the USA after World War I, when the welfare state extended benefits to veterans and to women. This led to expanding the franchise for women, as Theda Skocpol notes:

> In the 1920s American women built voluntary associations and engaged in the «municipal housekeeping» and proposed public social policies. They believed that their moral and educational styles of political practice could help clean up political corruption in the USA. ...Women built parallel organizations to male-dominated ones. They were more organized and could spread a policy idea quickly. They served as pressure groups and lobbied for their demands. The USA government ...separately administered benefits and protection for women...[1]

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(1) Theda Skocpol, 1992. Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social policy in the United States (Harvard University Press: USA), 527-535.

The post civil-war era (1990 and beyond) witnessed the birth of new powerful parties, with some parties surviving the civil war, while others becoming offshoots of pre-war parties and some defunct. During this **period** the overall membership in pre-war parties with leftist tendencies declined, while those with confessional membership and with religious orientations expanded.

Information obtained from party administrators shows that out of the 18 relevant parties, only five parties do not maintain women's wings. These are the leftist, civil and more progressive parties, characterized by lower religiosity, plural membership and democratic practices[1].

Several interviewees observed that female membership in pre-war secular and civil-confessional parties declined after the cessation of hostilities in 1990. This prompted political parties to look for ways and mechanisms to recruit women. Therefore, setting up women's wings was a possible solution, as a female activist reports:

> In the post-war period, the women's sector exerted efforts to mobilize women in addition to its traditional role of providing family support, eliminating discrimination against women and empowering them. Unfortunately, it failed to increase female membership or to be instrumental in elections.

Given this situation, female **activists of pre-war leftist** parties demanded that, «Women's wings must be dismantled to limit their adverse effects. They outlived their utility overtime and failed to increase female party membership, the raison d'être for establishing them». Others saw that by framing women within these units, parties are deliberately keeping them outside the decision-making circles. A female secretary-general of a post-war party with a civil agenda used this argument for not maintaining a women's wing.

Juxtaposing the views of female officials against those of the male party leaders revealed similar arguments. In this vein, the leader of a secular party announ**ced** that they took drastic measures to dismantle the women's wing, since it proved ineffective in expanding female membership and in amassing

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(1)   See Annex table, Political parties: Coding by party-level characteristics (Sbaity Kassem 2011).

the female votes in recent elections. He adds that, «Competition is severe and other parties appear to be more attractive to women and offer them more chances in leadership. Maybe, by mainstreaming women's issues, more women will be encouraged to join. We should do better by emulation!» This shows that marginalization may have positive – albeit unintended – consequences. Another party leader declared that, «We dismantled the women's wing in response to women's demands and to ease their frustrations from feelings of marginalization». However, he asserts that, «While these special units are effective as mobilization and electioneering mechanisms, they will be creating a critical mass of women via mainstreaming women within the party».

Adopting a linear approach to development, one perceives that post-war parties are «avant **guard**» and more «women friendly». They are more effective in creating a critical mass of women. In comparative perspective, these women-friendly outcomes become more pronounced in parties with lower religiosity, plura**listic** membership and democratic practices. Female party officials in the rank and file are empowered by their frustrations and by feelings of marginalization. This is reflected in a sharpening of their lobbying skills and putting forth stronger and more forceful demands to dismantle women's wings and to share in decision-making and leadership positions. Indeed, some of the post-war more secular and civil-confessional parties declared their intention to dismantle women's wings in response to demands **and to** lobbying by female officials. Action by some parties is postponed in view of strategic alliances with parties with religious platforms that maintain fu**lly** segregated women's wings.

Post-war civil-confessional and religious parties showed more resource-fulness in mobilizing women than pre-war parties (established before 1975). The variety of mobilization tools and smart tactics (financial incentives and in some cases «money for veiling», social services, religious counseling, arranged marriages, aggressive recruitment sprees) bore fruit and succeeded where efforts of pre-war secular parties with leftist orientation failed. This is evidenced by wide disparities between **the numbers of women-members** in pre-war secular and civil-confessional parties, on the one hand, **and those in post**-war civil-confessional and religious parties, on **the other**. This may largely explain the huge size of female membership in parties with religious platforms (see, charts extracted from Sbaity Kassem, 2011).

Chart 5.3 Femal Membership by Party-Religiosity
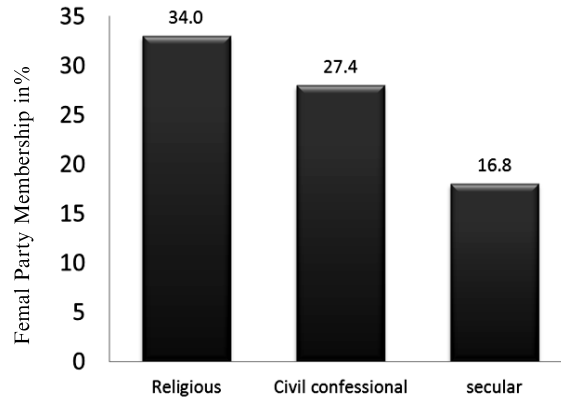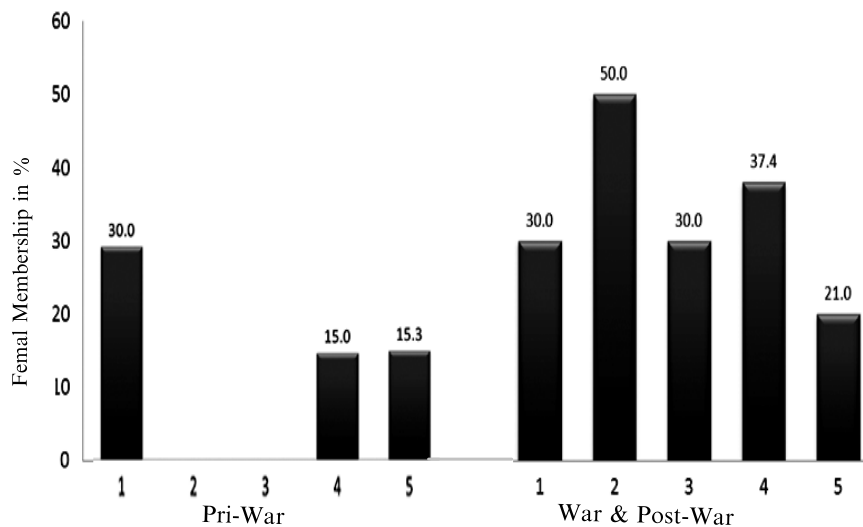Religious incl. Extremist, Conservative & Tolerrant Parties

Chart 5.4 Femal membership by Party-Age & Party-religiousity
(«1» Extremist; 2 Conservative; 3 Tolerant; 4 Civil-Cofessioneal; 5 Secular)

Interviewees from religious parties (of all religiosities) do not view women's wings as agents of **marginalization**. They consider them effective in recruiting women before and during elections. This is more pronounced in parties that resort to religious mobilization, but also in those that provide financial incentives in order to attract women, especially poor women. Empirical evidence has shown that women, especially poor women, are more

receptive to religious mobilization than men. However, depending on the intensity of religiosity, the views on women's wings differ even among religious parties. The head of the women's wing in a religious but tolerant party stressed that, «Women's wings are not only mechanisms for recruiting women, but are excellent electoral machineries. They spearhead electoral committees at the district level and work efficiently during elections». Another female official noted **that**: «We do not only recruit women but we are extremely effective during elections. These are our main functions, whether publicized or not!» The head of the women's wing in a pre-war religious extremist party also listed the positive outcomes that emanated from women's wings in the 2009 **elections**. She mentioned that the women's section mapped prospective voters, estimated their number and paid them visits to discuss their needs and the party's electoral platform. She also recounted that she represented the party on TV talk shows to show that women are politically active and empowered and publicized women's role in running the electoral campaign for the party. Women also arranged to transport female voters to ballot sites and monitored elections. Their role has been very effective, especially **since** women are 60% of voter turnout.

Hence heads of women's wings in pre-war civil-confessional parties maintained that such **these wings** should be retained, because they are effective mechanisms for recruitment, running electoral campaigns, fund-raising, and organizing social events. Some officials argued that these units address women's issues and represent their own parties in conferences and coordination meetings with allies. These units also cater to all generations and diverse interests of female members leading to mainstreaming women's issues across parties. The head of a women's wing explained that, «Younger female members prefer to work within professional and specialized sectors, while older members are more comfortable working with other women in special women's wings. Therefore, both arrangements are doable. These measures increased female membership». This statement demonstrates that women may opt to remain within women's wings and as such may not feel marginalized, while others may choose to be involved in specialized sectors or are mainstreamed within parties« structures in accordance with their own interests. In this vein, a female activist justified retaining women's wings

because, We are still in a patriarchal society. Women's wings are needed. They do not marginalize women but cater to their needs, build their political capabilities, and empower them. They offer women the choice to be as involved in politics as they want. «Indeed, parties in developed countries also maintain special women's wings, ministries for women and/or for equal opportunities, or other forms of national machineries for women. In this respect, a female official proposes to «...emulate these practices because they succeeded in empowering women and improving female representation».

In general, the views of leaders in religious parties and their male advisers on women's wings converged with those of female party officials. For instance, the leader of a pre-war religious extremist party stressed that, «the most important task of women's wings is employing religious mobilization to recruit women and helping the party during elections». However, some party leaders tended to boast that these wings empower women and to downplay the role they serve as recruitment and election mechanisms. In this respect, a senior adviser to the leader of a religious conservative but not extremist party explained that,

> Our women's association is creating a critical mass of women for leadership starting at middle management. We have women heading their own sectors and, as such, they have an informal influence on the party's decisions. We have very few women at the top but this should definitely improve overtime.

To corroborate these positive views, the head of the women's wing in a post-war religious conservative party maintained that, «Women's wings are essential and effective mechanisms for recruitment, education and bringing more women to the ballots. They do not marginalize women, but empower them. This is the only way that women can become politically active, given the segregation between women and men». In these instances, women – and not only parties – stand to gain from acquiring political education, as a female official in one of parties with religious platforms points out that, «Women's wings provide relief during conflict and are effective in recruiting women and in guaranteeing the female vote. They also initiate women into politics». These statements carry hope that eventually women's wings will have sufficient influence to lobby and push for women's leadership. Women's wings are effective in mobilizing women, guiding them in the right religious path, and in

amassing their votes during elections. The huge female membership in religious parties attests to the effectiveness of women's wings in recruitment. But, does that empower women? I note Basu's findings that religious parties have an «enormous capacity to mobilize women's movements while undermining women's advancement». (Basu, 2005: 35).

Conclusions

This article has shown that while women's wings are branded as ghettoizing or marginalization mechanisms, some **unintended positive women-empowering** consequences **may be engendered by them**. Frustrations from marginalization prompted some female activists to be more forceful in putting forth their demands to share in decision-making and leadership. They succeeded. **Others were instigated** to organize and lobby with party elites to dismantle women's wings because they ghettoize women. They also succeeded. Finally, such marginalization spearheaded **activity to mainstream** women's issues within the inner structures of political parties. By choice, women succeeded in joining specialized sectors of political and general **interest**, other than in women's issues.

Women's wings play a central role as mobilization and electioneering machineries, but are frequently seen as inimical to women's prospects for leadership within a party. They are formally established to mobilize women, but also to serve as «electioneering» machineries. The effectiveness of women's wings is examined as ghettoizing or empowering mechanisms by examining their role in expanding female membership, amassing the female vote during elections, and creating a critical mass for leadership. Post-war civil-confessional parties attest to their effectiveness in increasing female membership and in amassing the female vote. They are generally regarded, by more secular and progressive parties, of limited effectiveness in creating a critical mass of women for leadership. This is not sui generis to parties in Lebanon. Similar dynamics are perceived by Basu (2005), Clark and Schwedler (2003), and other scholars studying religious and Islamist parties in Arab and non-Arab countries. Unlike officials in secular and civil-confessional parties, interviewees from religious parties see women's wings as effective tools in fulfilling all the three goals for which they are established. They claim that

these units have positive aspects to them as they may also become more effective in creating a critical mass of women for leadership in the future.

Therefore, women's units marginalize women but they also help in providing them with political education to equip them for a political career. Feelings of marginalization may lead to frustrations akin to artists' creativity which explodes under pressure and repressive regimes. Frustrations from being ghettoized empowered women to demand dismantling women's wings. This empowered women and gave them impetus to lobby for equal opportunities to assume decision-making and leadership positions. Indeed, women's wings may well be ghettoizing mechanisms, however, frustrations from marginalization may also produce positive' - albeit counterintuitive, unintended consequences.

Annex 6.1 Political Parties: Coding by Party-Level Characteristics						
Political Parties (Listed in ascending order by party-age or year of birth)	Party Labels	Party-Age pre-war (0) war & post-war (1)	Religiosity '1' highest '5' lowest	Democratic procedures[1] '2' democratic; '1' democratic decision-making or leadership transitions; '0' not democratic	Pluralism in membership '1' multi-religious '0' single sect	Women's Wings '1' wings '0' no wings

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(1)   (DEM) stands for democratic procedures: This is a combined variable of leadership transitions and decision-making. (L) stands for leadership transitions, which is dichotomized by assigning '1' for parties that follow democratic transitions; and '0' for those that do not. (D) stands for decision-making, which is dichotomized by assigning '1' for decentralization or for parties which involve women in decision-making and '0' for centralization or for parties that do not involved women in decision-making.

Pre-War parties (Pre-1975)								
				L	D	DEM		
Communist	Secular	0	5	1	1	2	1	1
Syrian Social - Al-Qawmi Al-Souri	Secular	0	5	1	1	2	1	1
Phalanges - Kataʾb	Civil-conf.	0	4	0	1	1	0	1
National Bloc -Kutlah	Civil-conf.	0	4	0	1	1	0	0
Renaissance - Ba'ath	Secular	0	5	1	1	2	1	0
Progressive Socialist -Takaddomi Ishtiraki	Civil-conf.	0	4	0	1	1	1	1
National Liberals Ahrar	Civil-conf.	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Islamic Group - Ja-ma'a Islamiah	Religious extremist	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
War & Post-War Parties (Post-1975)								
Hope - Amal	Religious tolerant	1	3	0	0	0	0	1
Party of God -Hiz-bullah	Religious conservatv	1	2	0	0	0	0	1
Unitarian Islamic - Tawhid	Religious extremist	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Democratic -Wa'ad	Civil-conf.	1	4	0	1	1	0	0
Renewal Democratic -Tajaddod	Secular	1	5	0	1	1	1	0
Free Patriotic - Tayyar	Civil-conf.	1	4	0	1	1	1	1
Lebanese Forces - Quwwat	Civil-conf.	1	4	0	1	1	0	1
Islamic Action Front Jab-hat El-Amal	Religious ex-tremist	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Future - Mustaqbal	Civil-conf.	1	4	0	1	1	1	1
Giants - Marada	Civil-conf.	1	4	0	1	1	0	1