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Lebanese Trade Unions and Independent Professional Associations: A Review in Light of the Popular Movement

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Introduction

On 17 October 2019, Lebanon saw the rise of a popular movement denouncing the widespread corruption of the country's ruling class. Dubbed the 17 October Uprising, the unprecedented movement swept through various major Lebanese cities, including Beirut, Saïda, Tyre, Tripoli, and many others. In parallel, academics and activists debated the importance of having various organizational frameworks (partisan, union-based, or professional) that could take charge of organizing popular protests. These organizations would help frame demands in political agendas that play a crucial role in achieving the desired democratic transition.^[i] This discussion – or at least parts of it – resulted from the almost total absence of any effective official union role in the popular movement, as opposed to other uprisings in the Arab region, where independent professional associations or trade unions played a pivotal role in the action. They demanded change, organized protests, and even took part in negotiations – such as in Sudan's case).^[ii]

In fact, a quantitative study carried out during the 17 October Uprising showed that 95% of protestors were unaffiliated with trade unions. It also revealed that only 5% of demonstrators were affiliated with free-profession unions, such as non-labour professional associations or unions that include physicians, lawyers, nurses, engineers or the Teacher Union for example.^[iii]

Based on this discussion, some citizens focused their efforts on improving the roles of existing professional unions by freeing them from their affiliations with the traditional ruling parties so that they could reclaim their fundamental function. Others sought to establish new independent professional associations capable of playing pivotal roles in organizing the masses and voicing demands. This became one of the October Uprising's objectives – in parallel with other demands, such as the independence of the judiciary and forming a transitional government with exceptional legislative powers.

These crucial demands were the result of years' worth of efforts that sought to advance unions that are independent from the ruling class and conventional



political parties. Unlike other experiences in the Arab world, where independent unions gradually transformed into key players and organizers of protests, such as the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) or the National Council of Professors of Higher Education in Algeria, the popular movement in Lebanon highlighted the potential role of professional union in reclaiming democratic life through these entities. It also fostered attempts of creating independent professional unions, such as the Lebanese Professionals Association (LPA).

Undoubtedly, the 17 October Uprising created a massive momentum among unions which was reflected in most elections since 2019. The post-uprising era saw protest supporters defeat the ruling parties. Melhem Khalaf was elected Head of the Beirut Bar Association in 2019, opposition factions won student council elections at private Lebanese universities in 2020, and there was a landslide win for the Order of Engineers and Architects in 2021.

Most recent publications about unions or independent professional/labour associations in Lebanon attribute the inefficient and weak union organizational skills to two main reasons. First, the influence of traditional and sectarian political parties on professional and trade unions, and by extension the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL). The CGTL gradually submitted to the ruling class and became one of its pawns, rather than taking on a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights.^[iv] Second, the weak role of trade unions in the neoliberal and rentier economy that has taken over Lebanon since the end of the Civil War (1975-1990).^[v] This has marginalized the official advocacy of professional and trade unions and has fostered the informal economy.^[vi] Naturally, these factors inevitably restricted the capacity of professional/trade unions to advocate for their rights and demand change. These organizations have been denied the role of fostering, launching, and organizing popular action. They have been incapable of participating in laying the foundations of a new Lebanese regime, per the calls of some opposition forces. In other words, the violations committed by the sectarian neoliberal regime in Lebanon have suffocated political or union organizations, which could have provided the backbone for a successful uprising to achieve a transition to a new political regime.^[vii]

Furthermore, this paper presents an alternative approach to understanding the role of unions or professional associations in Lebanon, beyond the “sectarian” and



“neoliberal” dimension. It examines the organizational and political challenges facing these entities, particularly by discussing the question of the relationship between “union” action – i.e. unions exclusively advocating for worker’s interest and so-called political action. It also discusses the impact of this debate on the odds of successful organization and advocacy, all the way to winning union elections, and perhaps playing a larger role on the national scene. Indeed, researcher Agnès Favier, who has already studied student movements in Lebanon prior to the Civil War, notes that the union vs political question has always been at the centre of “union” discussions and their attempts to self-organize on a students’ level in this case. This, in turn, directly affected their political effectiveness, as well as their sustainability. There were many organizational obstacles, two of which stand out. First, the wider the representation – the less homogeneous these unions were politically, the more their demands diverged. Second, in an attempt to avoid this dilemma, they sometimes applied the “lowest common denominator” principle to ensure cohesion. These two obstacles certainly weakened their organizational capabilities and prevented them from playing a pivotal political role in the country.^[viii]

Consequently, the question examined in this paper lies in the debate and the separation or complementarity between purely demands-based union action (on a union or professional association level) and political action (on a national level). To what extent does this question impact the sustainability or effectiveness of independent unions in Lebanon, particularly during the popular movement? Are independent professional unions supposed to adhere to the “lowest common denominator” principle to organize and defend their interests? Or, should they transform into launch pads for a political partisan organizations?

This paper will attempt to answer these questions by providing a critical review of the professional union experience in Lebanon, or even the attempts to form independent professional associations. It will focus on two main experiences stemming from the 17 October Uprising: the landslide win by Uprising supporters in the Order of Engineers and Architects (OEA) elections in 2021, and university instructors’ experience with the LPA (LPA – Professors) – an attempt born out of the popular movement on 17 October 2019. This study relies on in-depth interviews with union and social movement players in Lebanon, with respect to



their experiences with union action and attempts to form independent unions. Subject-matter literature was also reviewed, while closely following these professional associations and unions, as well their electoral campaigns.

The paper is written in four chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general and quick overview of the history of union action in Lebanon, while providing an overview of the need to differentiate between trade unions and professional associations (also called unions in Lebanon). The second chapter addresses the concept of union “independence” in Lebanon, the changes made to this concept, and the refusal of some to use it when defining their union action. Chapter 3 presents the OEA experience and the win of the “Naqaba Tantafid,” which translates from Arabic into “The Order Revolts coalition, which stemmed from the 17 October Uprising. The fourth and final chapter reviews the LPA, or Professors experience and its short-lived journey. Lastly, the study draws general conclusions and inferences about the importance and challenges of independent union action in Lebanon.

Unions: Advocacy for Rights

A Reflection of the General Political Context

Historically, labour, demands-based movements predate the creation of The State of Greater Lebanon (1920). Mount Lebanon had witnessed a series of popular demands-based protests –Ammiyat in Arabic, or Popular Organizations – led by peasants against feudalism and land owners. Following the enactment of the 1919 Ottoman Law, which identified the functions of associations in Lebanon, labour associations were formed – mostly involving workers and employers alike and focused on objectives of cooperation and support amongst members.^[ix]

Labour and demands-based movements in Lebanon evolved over the years. They were mostly influenced by left-wing – such the communist revolution – or even right-wing ideologies. These movements were not isolated from the larger political or partisan context of the country. In fact, they were often a reflection and an outcome, sometimes even a precursor to it. For example, the General Federation



of Tobacco Workers in Lebanon was founded in 1924, based on an initiative by Fouad El-Chemaly, who co-founded the Lebanese People's Party, which later became the Lebanese Communist Party. In 1944, the General Federation of Worker and Employee Unions in Lebanon was founded, consisting of 15 (fifteen) unions and 12 (twelve) union committees. Following independence in 1943 and the structural evolution of the Lebanese economy, unions played a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights with employers. They called for the enactment of a labour law that guarantees and protects their rights from injustice (1946).^[x] These movements later gave way to the CGTL in 1958.

Right before the Civil War, when wages were shrinking under exacerbated social crises and political demands advanced by national left-wing parties, unions played a crucial and pivotal role in demands-based movements – whether run by students or workers. However, these social movements were soon faced with a harsh reality. The Lebanese capitalist system in crisis, combined with other factors, had led to the outbreak of the Civil War, given the economic disparities between different social classes on the one hand, as well as the centre (Beirut) and peripheral areas – southern Lebanon, northern Lebanon, etc. – on the other.^[xi] Despite consecutive crises and violent civil clashes, demands-based movements continued to evolve. The CGTL was even capable of mobilizing the masses into calling for the end of the Civil War in the late 1980s.^[xii]

In the aftermath of the Civil War and the Taif Agreement, the role of CGTL seemed reinvigorated. It had illustrated that it was capable of mobilizing the masses against the government, as well as its abilities to advocate for workers' rights. Against the backdrop of the devaluation of the national currency and the nationwide economic crisis in May 1992, the CGTL – headed by Antoine Bechara – organized national protests that overthrew Omar Karameh's government. In 1997, there was a clear official intent to subdue the CGTL with the decision to ban protests and some members supporting the government to increase the odds of securing the CGTL president position.^[xiii]

Since then, the CGTL faltered in advocating for the rights and interests of workers and employees, while gradually joining the ranks of the political authority bodies and representing their interests instead.



Consequently, as unions mirrored the general political context before the Civil War, they were entangled with and infiltrated by parties using a political and sectarian quota system. They also used unions to advance political or economic agendas. Despite this dominance, unions soon began to show signs of independence from the ruling class. As the neoliberal economic system increasingly affected labour over the past two decades, several attempts were made to form unions, such as the Spinneys workers' attempt to form a union. This was actually the first attempt at a trade union in the private sector. This experience was marred by clientelism that undermined the ability of workers who wanted to form a union to act independently from their employers.^[xiv] There was also the difficulties of being pre-approved by the Ministry of Labour and the fallout of workers filing the application. The Union of Migrant Workers in Lebanon was also formed with the direct support of Lebanese activists.^[xv] One of the most important labour movements was the Union Coordination Committee (UCC), which practically laid the foundation of the popular “You Stink” movement that protested the waste crisis in 2015 until the 17 October Uprising.

During the 17 October Uprising against the ruling elite and mainstream parties, many participants denounced the absence of professional/trade unions. These unions were seen as a tool that could have potentially fulfilled an essential role of mobilizing and organizing the masses, or perhaps playing an even greater role in ensuring the transition of power. Since then, union and student council elections took on a new dimension. They no longer reflected attempts and initiatives by individuals. Rather, they became directly connected to a popular grassroots movement calling for the ousting of the political class. Therefore, professional/student union/associations transformed into frameworks exhibiting the first signs of the desired change and the reflection of popular demands.

Independent Professional Unions: Names and Expectations

The 17 October Uprising has not achieved much of the immediate demands raised by the different components of the popular movement at the time – such as the Independence of the Judiciary Law, a transitional government with exceptional



powers, or the enactment of a law to recover Lebanon’s stolen assets. However, it gave way to new public discourse that vehemently opposes the ruling class under the “All Means All” slogan, which means that all political parties and ruling participating in post-war governments were seen as responsible for the economic and social collapse of Lebanon.^[xvi] This opposing view of the ruling class was reflected in union elections. It manifested practically through three key elections, where the opposition forces defeated mainstream parties, namely:

- The Beirut Bar Association elections, won by Melhem Khalaf, lawyer and current Head of the Beirut Bar Association. He was dubbed the “thawra,” or “revolutionary” candidate.
- Student council elections that took place within private universities
- OEA elections

The results of these elections came as a natural and direct extension of the 17 October Uprising. Some even say that the parliamentary elections in Spring 2022 will yield a similar outcome for Lebanon’s opposition, even if the win is not yet guaranteed. The conditions for winning union elections are quite different from those of parliamentary elections. They involve many political and electoral factors to be determined according to the political context in Lebanon and resources needed for the elections, including those necessary electoral campaigns, etc. Therefore, it is important to point out two considerations. **First**, the professional unions discussed in this paper are not trade unions that represent a large workforce. They are professional unions, which represent a middle class that may find it easier to free itself from the ruling regime. **Second**, the confusion over the meaning of the term “independence” – or even its many associated interpretations – has significant impact on political coalitions.

Professional Associations and Trade Unions

Before delving into the role of unions and their impact on political national change, it’s important to point out that what are in fact called professional unions or “free profession” unions (the Bar Association, the OEA, and others), are not



trade unions. They are not even unions per se. Legally, they are formed by virtue of a law passed by Parliament. They are not regulated by the Lebanese labour movement or the Law on Social Security, but rather, they have their own laws and regulations. One of the main conditions to practice the profession is union membership. As such, the State would relinquish its role in regulating the profession, “hence the nomenclature of free professions, as in free from the Law, and by extension the Labour Law.”^[xvii] In general, the main concern for these entities is to first ensure the interests of members and determine the terms of membership in order to protect the profession. For example, non-Lebanese nurses cannot join the Order of Nurses, ergo non-nationals cannot practice nursing in Lebanon.^[xviii]

In contrast, trade unions are regulated by the Lebanese Labour Law and the Law on Social Security. Membership is optional, i.e. individuals may join the union but it's not a stipulation for practicing their profession. Trade unions are established through an application submitted by a group of individuals to the relevant minister – in this case it's submitted to the Minister of Labour. This process has sometimes hindered the creation of independent trade unions due to the vulnerability of applicants between filing the application and obtaining the license. The employer is entitled to terminate the employment of these individuals who don't have any legal protection. In other cases, it has facilitated the creation of pseudo shelf-unions that have no real representation, and just help secure victories for mainstream parties in CGTL elections. In this context, one must note that union action is restricted in Lebanon. The country did not sign the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention,^[xix] requiring every trade union to be licensed by the relevant ministry, i.e. Ministry of Labour.

Therefore, the so-called free profession unions are not, in fact, unions, in the legal sense of the word. These types of unions represent mainly the middle class, and not necessarily the working class.

Independent Unions

It is common knowledge that mainstream parties have infiltrated and controlled trade and professional unions. This justified calls by opposition forces to reclaim



union action and achieve independence. The interpretation and uses of the term “independence” has gradually led some to fully reject it as an attribute of the opposing union movement. According to activist and journalist Paul Achcar, who followed and engaged in most civil social movements since the end of the Civil War, independence is an “ambiguous term. Sometimes it refers to the left, while other times it refers to the opposition. Sometimes it evokes revolution, and sometimes it pertains strictly to professional matters.”^[xx] As such, the word “independence” could hold many interpretations, according to the prevailing political context in which it is mentioned. However, despite the many dimensions that the term “independent” takes on, it was usually used as an umbrella term by anyone running for union (parliamentary or municipal) elections against the parties in power operating based on quotas and clientelism. In fact, this call for independence varied from individual initiatives that mostly relied on the social capital of union positions candidates, to independent union movements, as well as the rejection of the very term “independent” in the OEA elections in 2021.

In the narrow sense of the word, independence was sometimes linked to “independent” individuals, who do not belong to political parties but have a certain social capital. This was the case when the OEA’s independence at one point was associated to the persona of Assem Salam (1996-1999) who won the OEA President position against PM Rafic Hariri’s candidate, campaigning on the platform of Beirut reconstruction.

However, some believe that a critical look into these so-called “independent” experiences is indeed required. According to architect Abir Saksouk, “Assem Salam or the pre-Civil War unionists are part of the ‘experts’ belonging to a certain social class that is already linked to the ruling political class. They contributed to the creation of the OEA (influenced by conceptions of modernism). The OEA laws they drafted were not always in the best interests of society, but mostly of the elite. For instance, mandating that construction permits must go through the OEA ‘robs’ people of the possibility of practicing vernacular architecture, outlawing them. In addition, the OEA Law itself does not differentiate between an employed engineer/architect and an employer engineer/architect (owner of the firm). Consequently, the employed engineer/architect falls within the same category of major firms, having the same rights, but also the same obligations.”^[xxi]



These interpretations do not necessarily serve society as much as they do the elitist vision of the union's role. As a result, unions become an extension of the Lebanese regime and its spirit.

On the other hand, independence was also linked to autonomous union movements. In the late 1990s, some activists from the OEA grouped together and later participated in several order elections as one bloc. It was formed by activists from the Communist Party, based on a personal decision rather than a central one from the party's leadership. At that time, they were considered independent. They later left the Communist Party and established what is now called the Independent Professional Choice, which participated in many union battles.

Despite this independent union movement, mainstream parties operating on quota standards remained largely in control, thus hindering the rise of a fully-formed bloc to run against them in elections. Instead, so-called independent candidates would be chosen for support, and the differences between parties and their agendas would be manipulated in an attempt to get these candidates across the finish line. These movements also included members close to the ruling parties,^[xxii] but with common views on union action: “when politics divided them, their profession brought them together.”^[xxiii]

As a result, There was no explicit political rhetoric disseminated by the union movement and unions – i.e. their view on the regime, political life and reinstating unions as a key player on the Lebanese political scene.^[xxiv] Consequently, the rhetoric among professional unions remained for decades limited to matters relating to their members and their benefits, such as insurance and policies. However, these movements provided implicitly a political rhetoric – albeit shy – critiquing the performance of parties, inside the union and in the national scene. For example, Bar Association elections involved discussions on public freedoms and human rights under the Syrian mandate in Lebanon.

In 2015, as a response to Lebanon's waste crisis, a grassroots youth movement (You Stink) openly criticized the ruling class. They also held the government accountable not only for the waste crisis, but also for the rampant corruption in the country as a whole. The movement relaunched the conversation about the need to reclaim representative institutions through elections in order to influence



the desired change and bring the protests from the streets to institutions. Different groups emerged from this movement, embodying the spirit of opposition. For example, Beirut Madinati, which in Arabic means Beirut, My City, consisted of educated middle-class people, including university professors, technicians, and experts with their own views of the city. There were also other initiatives like Citizens in a State, or Baalbek Madinati (Baalbek My City). These initiatives participated in the 2016 municipal elections. Beirut Madinati achieved excellent results in the Beirut municipal elections, coming ever so close to breaching PM Saad El Hariri's backed ticket. This experience was very encouraging for many people leaning towards the opposition. This was gradually reflected in union elections, especially the OEA.

The popular movement that gradually gained definition against the ruling parties combined, gave a new meaning to independence. It meant independence from concepts of political quotas, sectarianism, and freedom from clientelism. Initially, this independence did not mean absolute opposition against the regime and parties in power. The independence question was already discussed during the 2018 OEA elections, which prompted candidate Jad Tabet to not reject parties and affiliated engineers, but “to ask them to carry the mission of engineers to their parties rather than that of the parties to the OEA”^[xxv] as a condition to stop quota practices and solidify the OEA independence. This laid the foundation for a rhetoric calling for an “OEA independent from the quota principle,” where key positions on the OEA council and delegate committees are freed from partisan and sectarian quotas. There was also explicit discourse regarding the need to fight the outrageous waste of OEA funds (hospitalization process), and to distance the profession from clientelism networks (issuing permits, etc). “So, independence means working for the interests of all engineers and architects and not just for parties to use the OEA for their own benefit (conferences, lands acquired by the OEA, engineers chosen based on partisan affiliation, etc.).”^[xxvi]

Finally, after the 17 October movement fostered the creation of partisan political groups with their own rhetoric and clear agendas, independence was interpreted in a way that made some completely reject using the term “independent” to define their political and union work. “We are not independent, we support the 17 October [Uprising],” meaning they belong to the 17 October Uprising forces.



According to certain activists, this fact cannot align with so-called independents, a nomenclature adopted by certain parties close to the political regime. The independence rhetoric “was and always will be the system’s Trojan horse in unions and politics, to infiltrate the change that is coming.”^[xxvii] Therefore, it is necessary to reject this term, to shut down all attempts by mainstream parties and forces “to ride the wave of the Uprising wave,” as they say.

The Order of Engineers and Architects (OEA): From “Naqabati” to “The Order Revolts”

The Order of Engineers and Architects (OEA) was established in 1951 by engineers from similar social classes and educational backgrounds. Due to their privilege, they were in some way independent from the political class, despite their close ties through social or even familial relations.^[xxviii]

However, mainstream parties gradually took over the OEA, like other professional and trade unions in Lebanon. With time, the OEA became a “service” union, reinforcing clientelism and subjugation to governing authorities. The OEA played a significant role in serving the rentier economy and providing considerable profit for investors by facilitating the work of contractors, such as through construction permits. This substantially limited the role of the OEA to commissions and played a big role in providing the best offers for medical coverage.^[xxix] Simultaneously, the “elitist rule” once again turned into a political base. Parties and sects controlled the narrative and took over union action.^[xxx] In contrast, sectarian parties operating on the basis of clientelism and quotas did not assert absolute control over the OEA. Consecutive elections, as previously mentioned, were marked by independent players or groups that vehemently tried to save the OEA from quotas and the corrupt ruling class. Albeit, these attempts were always limited in opposition anchored in the social capital of certain individuals or groups that were somewhat independent from their parties. Furthermore, these experiences were practically separate from any popular movement on the ground. The first OEA elections that were directly linked to popular movements took place in 2017, when the independent forces only won the OEA presidency position with their



“Naqabati” campaign. Then in 2021, “The Order Revolts” ticket secured a landslide win in the OEA council and delegate committees.

“Naqabati – My OEA for the Female and Male Engineer”: A Partial Success Story

The first OEA elections to be directly, or indirectly, involved with the popular movement were the OEA presidency elections in 2017, following the “You Stink” movement of 2015 and the municipal elections of 2016. In 2017, a new entity was formed under the name of “Naqabati” (My OEA) before later becoming “My OEA for the Female and Male Engineer”.

“My OEA” consisted of seasoned engineers who had already run in elections such as Bachar Abdel Samad and Habib Sadeq of the Independent Union Choice, and members of the Beirut Madinati campaign, as well as a group of young independent academics and activists. These youth groups introduced a specific dynamic through their regional work by organizing largescale meetings that naturally took on union and political dimension against the influence of traditional leaderships. Therefore, Naqabati provided an opportunity for different generations to come together and develop a campaign agenda, as seasoned and young activists played a significant role in the popular movement.[\[xxxii\]](#) The Naqabati platform could be considered the result of years of hard work aimed at ensuring OEA independence from quota-operating parties and reclaiming the “builder” profession to its former glory, far from the role that slowly distanced the OEA from the concerns of society. In 2017, Eng. Jad Tabet ran for the position of OEA President at the head of the Naqabati ticket on the platform of “Reclaiming Union Legacy to Build Society and State”— given that its role was limited to “recording construction transactions and playing mediator between the engineer and the insurance company.”[\[xxxiii\]](#)

Therefore, Naqabati became an attempt to reclaim the engineering profession and acknowledge its social role. Jad Tabet won the elections under the Naqabati, or independents’ ticket, after a fierce battle with Free Patriotic Movement’s (FPM) candidate, Paul Najem, who led a coalition ticket including the FPM, Hezbollah, Amal Movement, Lebanese Forces, and the Future Movement.[\[xxxiv\]](#) However, the



Naqabati ticket lost the OEA council seats to the parties' coalition. As such, the OEA council and president were not on the same page, thereby allowing mainstream parties to ensure their interests to a great extent through OEA membership.

The Naqabati initiative was faced with several challenges, namely being an electoral coalition established only after two months of efforts. Its members were bonded by the lowest common denominator – fighting the corruption of the ruling class and the need to win OEA elections. According to a campaign activist, “campaign organizers were the ultimate decision-makers. Decisions were not open for discussion. The process was not participatory and no committees were formed to tackle specific issues. Decision-making remained in the hands of the elite that had formed Naqabati and had run in the elections[.]”^[xxxiv] This led to a rift between the base and the elite later on, post-elections. It was not necessarily due to political or ideological reasons, but rather to “generational” factors, according to Naqabati members. Decisions were made by the older, more seasoned political generation and Naqabati could not accommodate the younger generation, which was eager to work – radically at times – in tandem with the anger building up among the grassroots against the ruling class.^[xxxv] Young activists tried to establish decentralized work structures that were not exactly welcomed by the leadership. This reflected the vision inside Naqabati – a seasoned, experienced generation versus a young, eager but inexperienced generation. Some believed that, for the seasoned elite, the role of “the youth was to provide support and gain experience, only.” Therefore, Naqabati was an electoral coalition and not a professional or political structure with a clear set of goals. Despite repeated attempts to identify some political direction, discussions always lacked an economic, or even political dimension in general. According to a member, “our only common denominator is that we belong to the opposition forces. We did not set a political, economic, and social direction. We did not have bylaws. It was more of a coordination framework among individuals.”^[xxxvi]

Obviously, the aforementioned factors negatively affected the work of Naqabati after winning the OEA President position. Some activists believe that the decision-making process could not sustain the engagement of a large number of opposition engineers. In fact, “decisions were kept centralized and made by 7 or 8 individuals.



As a result, Naqabati, as a group, was later excluded from union action.”^[xxxvii]

Despite winning the elections, Naqabati was effectively unable to set clear decision-making processes. According to someone working in Naqabati (the campaign), “it was an ambiguous coalition,” and was forsaken the moment Naqabati won the OEA presidency. As a result, many young engineers were discouraged. An implicit or explicit schism became evident between some activists and the OEA President, and thus by extension between them and the OEA, despite keen efforts to place the OEA at the core of independent political action. Naqabati was not a positive experience for engineers affiliated with opposition movements. Many of them were frustrated with “the appeasement within the OEA, and consequently appeasing the parties in power, as well as their inability to fight....”^[xxxviii] By the time the 17 October Uprising erupted, a rift set in within Naqabati ranks. At the time, certain engineers called on Jad Tabet, OEA President, to announce his explicit support of the Revolution, to present the role desired from the OEA in the popular movement and transition to power. Tabet did not respond to these calls, despite some attempts to protest this neutrality and demands to shut down the OEA. As the popular movement evolved, along with the attempt to form the Lebanese Professionals Association, many decided to move on from Naqabati to “LPA – Engineers”, voiding Naqabati of members – except those who are closest to OEA President Tabet.

“The Order Revolts”: A Model?

The 17 October Uprising has certainly given many a glimmer of hope of reclaiming the political space and initiating change. This included hopes of taking back control of unions to rid them of quota-operating parties. The first post-Uprising elections were held in the Bar Association and were won by the current President of the Bar Melhem Khalaf – dubbed the Revolution’s Candidate. This win created new momentum for those who had given up on union action. It affected the opposition engineers directly, especially that OEA elections were to be held in March 2019, four months after the popular uprising. For the activist engineers, “the 17 October Uprising imposed its decentralized and participatory traits, turning the table on traditional union action practiced by mainstream union forces and parties.”^[xxxix] Therefore, the thought process focused on the need to fulfil the



Uprising's demands on the one hand, and to prepare for OEA elections on the other. As a result, many activist engineers joined the LPA (an association that was still under development at the time meant to follow the popular movement). They formed what later became LPA – Engineers. The OEA elections were undoubtedly a main objective for the LPA – Engineers, which included opposition parties and groups that do not necessarily agree on all political matters, but on the need to overthrow the parties in power — LiHaki, also known as My Rights Group, the Communist Party, and Citizens in a State. They too worked on the basis of the lowest common denominator. Naturally, the elections overshadowed all other demands due to their imminent date. An external relations committee was formed, consisting of Bachar Abdel Samad, Ali Darwish, Imad Amer, and Abir Saksouk. The committee met with opposition parties. According to a committee member, they “realized after the meetings that the parties do not want this framework,”^[xl] for many reasons, including the lack of a unified political vision and objective), hence the idea of forming “The Order Revolts” coalition. In addition to LPA – Engineers, it included developing parties and groups aligned with the 17 October movement –the Communist Party, *Ammiyat 17 Teshrin* People of 17 October, Citizens in a State, Jal El Dib Rebels, etc.). At the time, the union movement was scattered. Within one year, there were three main groups all at once: *Naqabati*, The Order Revolts, and LPA – Engineers. After the establishment of The Order Revolts, and the migration of what was left of *Naqabati*, the LPA – Engineers became an empty shell, because it never unified them in the first place. It never went beyond expressing support for the Uprising. The Order Revolts turned into an electoral framework that would go on to winning the elections. It was born out of discord to fulfil a need for a unified body to converge views “between the different groups and to go through the elections, unified. LPA – Engineers started by gathering most of the components associated with the 17 October Uprising, with an interest in or involvement with union action. This resulted in an open coalition comprising over 17 different groups.”^[xli]

The first discussions, within LPA – Engineers or The Order Revolts, seemed democratic. However, their tendency towards partisanship was already showing at the time. “The coalition almost turned into partisan cantons. It also showed the main differences between opposition parties.” As a result, disputes were aligned with partisan ideologies regarding the role of the Uprising. One of the main points



of dissonance revolved around the relation between the professional and the political. Were they supposed to seize this opportunity to solely focus on propelling the profession and its social role further? Or should they solely build this framework as a continuation to the existing popular movement and demand a transition of power? This led to alienating certain architects who were trying to defend the city and its way of life under the pretext of being close to ruling parties. Indeed, many reformist architects were first marginalized from The Order Revolts only because they were close to the parties in power, hence the differentiation between a “rebellious” engineer and an “unrebellious” engineer. The Order Revolts became a reflection of the revolution at some point. Instead of unifying efforts on a union level, it turned into a political battlefield, sifting through the rebels and non-rebels. There was no room left for discussions pertaining to union matters. “Topics were limited to fighting the system, while discussions around the social role of the union became non-existent.”[xlii]

However, despite these challenges that reflected the political climate in the country at the time, the experience was transparent from day one. In fact, unlike the outcome of the *Naqabati* experience, which mainly revolved around Jad Tabet, the work done by The Order Revolts was participatory, democratic, and decentralized. For example, participating forces voted to choose the coalition’s name from several suggestions. “The Order Revolts” –which clearly showcases the alignment between the 17 October Uprising and the coalition – won.[xlvi] In addition, different committees were formed, such as the Candidates Selection Committee. It focused on setting frameworks for public debates among candidates and providing equal opportunity and unified standards for choosing the right candidate, similar to preliminary elections.[xlv] In spite of significant challenges and differences in the first few months, the illegal deferment of OEA elections for seven consecutive times was ultimately for the benefit of The Order Revolts. The deferment was in principle due to Covid-19, but in reality, mainstream parties wanted to postpone in an attempt to gain more time and for fear of losing. It provided them with enough time to get organized. The coalition had the opportunity to put its house in order, persevere, communicate with engineers, and engage in developing an agenda that places the OEA right at the center of the fight for social causes. In 2019, Aref Yassine, dubbed as “the man of humble beginnings” won the presidency of the OEA[xlv]. His victory was unlike that of others who had



won before him either for belonging to a certain social class and having a social and professional capital, or for being close to parties in power. It was a victory aligned with the spirit of the 17 October Uprising and proof of the efforts made on the ground. This victory also went against the typical sectarian quota approach. For years, the Future Movement had believed that it was the party that named the future President of the OEA. The candidate that won however, was closer to the Communist Party. He is a Shiite, and the first OEA President to strike his sect from the Civil Status records in Lebanon. The regime accused Aref Yassine of being a communist, yet he ran a mainly solo electoral campaign and had views opposing to the Communist Party.[\[xlvi\]](#)

Furthermore, The Order Revolts introduced a unique experience to the electoral scene in Lebanon. It started by setting a specific mechanism for candidate selection that had started with the *Beirut Madinati* municipal campaign.[\[xlvii\]](#) It consisted of a public debate in order to choose the candidates for OEA president. However, the lack of female candidates was noticeable, despite the substantial gender diversity in its base. The platform was developed based on a democratic and participatory approach, reflecting the principles of the 17 October Uprising. The platform committee visited various regions to survey engineers. It also held regional meetings to develop a platform that spoke to the aspirations of engineers and architects.[\[xlviii\]](#) Unlike the previous experience, the battle of the generations turned into a generational exchange of expertise: experience met with youth and the spirit of the revolution. This exchange significantly helped reign in the coalition. Moreover, the platform was not only limited to the organization of the profession like before. It went as far as making the OEA a pivotal actor in society. The first and second items on the platform – as in the priorities seemingly – called for an effective role for the OEA. They proposed that the OEA “present solutions and work alongside other unions on matters of public interest,” and to become “the first line of defence of society.”

Through this platform, The Order Revolts explicitly stood as the complete opposite of the ruling regime, as clearly seen in the promotional video for its electoral campaign, transcribed into the table below:

Table 1: The Content of One of the Promotional Videos of The Order Revolts



Us (The Order Revolts)	Them (The Regime)
A coalition born out of the Revolution	A system consisting of the ruling parties
Elections are a means to enact change from within	Elections are a means to score points
A coalition that relies on research, participation, democracy, and transparency	Groups implementing the agenda set by the chief according to alliances
For holding the elections on time and effecting change as soon as possible	For stalling the elections until their quotas are complete
Our candidates are chosen based on public criteria and debates	Their candidates are chosen based on last-minute deals

While this win was a clear victory for the 17 October Uprising, it started an extensive debate on the nature of alliances during union elections. The Order Revolts is comprised of 23 groups born out of 17 October.[\[xliv\]](#) They made an alliance with the Lebanese Opposition Front[\[l\]](#) that consisted of parties that some consider to be a part of the political system— such as the Lebanese Kataeb Party, or the Independence Movement. Indeed, when the time came to form ballot tickets, there was an intense debate started by those who refused to agree to an alliance with these parties. The discussions and negotiations resulted in these parties refraining from nominating any individual representing or affiliated with any party, in order to promote transparency and enact peaceful, democratic change within the OEA.[\[li\]](#)

Lebanese Professionals Association (LPA) – Professors: Impossible Organization?

After the popular uprising broke out in Lebanon in October 2019, many individuals came together by personal initiative to form what later became known as the Lebanese Professionals Association (LPA). The LPA is an independent inclusive framework comprising many representatives of free and liberal trades, professions or sectors, such as: engineers, physicians, university professors, journalists, workers in the art sector, etc. The idea actually started to take shape on a WhatsApp group through “personal relations and individuals who had previously worked in the field and have past experiences... each individual started talking to



a group of people of the same profession...it started with small groups that grew over time.”^[lii]

The Sudanese experience was the organizational reference for this specific Lebanese initiative. A group of university professors (from private and public institutions) were calling for a protest around the same time. Although there was no initial contact, the two groups eventually connected to coordinate and to meet for the first time in Laazariah Square, where around fifty people including physicians, university professors, and artists came together. The Lebanese Professionals Association was chosen as a name for the group, which consisted of independent individuals, as well as others with clear political affiliations – such as The Communist Party, *LiHaki* Group, or Citizens in a State.

It is an open association that includes individuals from different free professions and sectors. At the start, it did not have clear objectives. However, it worked on motivating the struggle based on societal needs rather than primary sectarian and regional. It aimed to liberate professional syndicates, unions, and associations from the control that the regime had imposed since the end of the Civil War, as well as supporting the uprising and its demands.^[liii] Nonetheless, these objectives remained general, changing from time to time according to the general context and the discussions that developed later on as the LPA evolved.

Although the common denominator was to create an independent entity without affiliations to any political party, discussions seemed thorny, most notably with regards to the political and advocacy role. As a result, arguments were had between those who wanted to benefit from this platform and turn it into a political entity, i.e. a party with a national role, and those who wanted to optimize professional unions. The latter also wanted to reclaim these platforms from mainstream parties, or those who see the association as a body supporting the popular movement on the ground.

Consequently, many questions arose: Is the objective only to support the popular movement, or to take over the regime? Is the objective to overthrow the regime, or to open a dialogue to fulfil demands? Is the objective to form shadow unions, or to reclaim the unions dominated by mainstream parties?^[liv] The confusion was reflected bit by bit in subsequent statements, where, at times, “the demands



decreased, due to the lack of clarity on the vision, while adding new general directions related to democracy and secularism.”^[lv] In all cases, these discussions were happening within the various groups, including the LAP – Professors.

The Lebanese Professional Association - Professors

A large number of private and public university professors joined the popular movement when it first broke out. Their first contact was through open WhatsApp groups by personal invitation. The group was formed and its members decided to head to the streets, not as individuals, but as “University Professors Revolt.” They called for a protest on 23 October 2019 in Riyadh Al Soloh Square.^[lvi] Slogans were raised indicating the inclusive role of the LPA within society: “University Professors Stand United with Our Students...We want education and job creation inside our country, not abroad”. They issued a statement stating: “We are an independent group of university professors in Lebanon. We called for this protest near Martyrs Square today and formed an association to support the popular revolution. Our aim is to organise our ranks in the academic workplace, bring forth our demands, and coordinate our movement. The LPA is a professional association. We leave political propositions to other popular movements. We are working on reclaiming our space for professional organization.”^[lvi] At first, participants shows great enthusiasm and reflected serious conviction to get organised based on the profession in the workplace (namely universities). However, discussions were later derailed and became problematic. Political disputes turned personal in certain cases, and the identity of the founders of the initiative was called into question. The most important lesson learned from this experience is preparedness and organizational abilities, especially since the attempts to form a professors’ association were parallel to the popular movement and were, in fact, a reflection of it. There were also several issues associated with establishing a new professional entity.

The General Context: “Political” or “Professional” Organization in Parallel



to the Popular Movement

The most prominent challenges to the process of organizing were linked to the general context because it's technically impossible to isolate external factors (political or economic). The first issue was related to the political-professional debate. It is no secret that some wanted to build upon the organizational dynamic in order to transform the professional platform into a political one, to discuss political matters, and perhaps turn it into an organized “political party.” Others considered this dynamic damaging, as the goal must solely revolve around advancing the professors’ demands and improving professional conditions. In other words, the goal was to turn this association into what resembles a “union” that advocates for professors in particular and represents the educational sector in Lebanon.

Undoubtedly, the main political issues proposed at the time reflected the spirit of the uprising, but also contributed to some discord when forming the LPA - Professors. Politics were more divisive than inclusive, and several discussions characterized by multiple dimensions also took place. Some professors from various ideological backgrounds accused those who were pro-unions of being leftist and wanting to undermine “Lebanon’s wealth in the liberal economic system.” As such, they were quick to box unions and the left wing together, and called for completely forsaking the idea of unions. Others tried to keep the platform a general entity, limiting its role to supporting the revolution, since teachers and professors are the “mind of the revolution” and their job is to support the rebels on the ground. This was rejected because not only did it seem elitist, but was also counter-revolutionary, given that the popular movement refused any representative leadership at the time.[lviii]

National politics were bound to cause a rift that jeopardized the initiative’s survival, but the union movement also faced major challenges, such as the lack of unity among educational staff. The main question was: how could one body represent professors across Lebanon, when there are significant differences in legal and professional statuses from one university to another? Even though these political discussions were highly complex, they deepened the rift in views and weakened harmony among initiative founders. The professional and advocacy



matter seemed much more complicated and problematic. It was first considered a secondary issue, but it soon turned into a challenge as work progressed. The homogeneity of the legal statuses and various grades of professors was a topic of discussion, given the differences between public and private university professors. For example, it's common knowledge that private university professors – unlike in the public Lebanese University – are not considered employees since they work on a monthly contractual basis. They are also excluded from the NSSF and do not have a representative body on the national level.

As the economic crisis worsened in Lebanon and the national currency lost more of its value, faculties in universities did not suffer the same as the general public. Some universities offered their professors a part of their salaries in US dollars to compensate for the devaluation of the Lebanese pound. Others paid them according to the Central Bank's digital platform exchange rate (/3900/ LBP per USD), while others kept the same official exchange rate (/1500/ LBP per USD). Consequently, financial concerns and demands among professors across Lebanon were no longer unified. Instead, the general political environment created fundamental differences with respect to the demands and their priority from one university to another. Therefore, the founders of the initiative were unable to adopt a clear position on this matter.

Representation, Membership, and Decisions

At first, the initiative was spontaneous and filled with enthusiasm. However, as attempts to organize progressed, key issues regarding representation emerged and became one of the more thorny issues. For example, there was a discussion on whether the objective was to create a union in the legal sense of the word, or to limit it to an association. Forming a union requires, as previously mentioned, a permit from the Ministry of Labour, based on an application submitted by a number of professors. This posed an obstacle, especially since many participants did not agree to establish a union against the administration of their university (i.e. their employer). Some professors tried to benefit from several experiences (meeting with Ghassan Slaiby and The Legal Agenda). The pseudo-strategic



decision was to refrain from creating a union. But the truth is that “in order to fight this battle, there must be ten people ready to submit a permit application, knowing that they could get fired; but there were not enough people to move forward with it.”^[lix] Some professors also discovered by chance that there was a previous attempt to form a union for university professors in 2016. They had indeed formed a union chaired by Georges Nehme, Ph.D., the current Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Sagesse University. However, this was “voluntarily kept a secret by the founders who did not want to respond and discuss it.”^[lx]

Aside from the important point of whether or not to form a union or an association, there is the issue of representation. Who is considered a “professor” in the midst of the different types of work contracts in private or public universities: professors with tenure and working full time, part time, or teaching one session per year? Of course, it was very hard to regulate this issue, especially that the entity insisted on the concepts of participation and democracy. Other additional issues came to light when individuals who were not necessarily professors participated in the discussions. Another problem was whether the person was representing the university or themselves. In some groups, certain professors avoided positioning themselves against the university and its administration, considering the timing unfavourable. As such, defending the university became an integral part of their objective. Meanwhile, others considered this idea to be in complete contrast with the concept of professional organization which does not necessarily entail aligning employer interests with those of the employee.

Finally, as part of the representation issue, there was the matter of representative capacity. According to one of the professors, “it was hard for me to speak on behalf of my university or the professors, because I was not empowered to do so, nor was I elected for it. My participation was in an individual capacity.”^[xi] Sometimes professors of the initiative spoke for their colleagues or the professors of Lebanon without any official representative capacity. The body (LPA – Professors) did not yet get around to addressing these multiple problematic points.

Furthermore, another glaring issue in this context was related to the fact that professors who represented private universities were not organized within the workplace. Some universities even prohibited organized action. This is how a main thorn in the issue emerged: “an unorganized body wants to get organized in an



unprecedented political crisis. Impossible.”^[lxii]

Subsequently, discussions within certain groups revolved around the purpose of this experience considering the massive hurdles they were facing, particularly given the difficulty of unifying demands, or even political concerns amongst everyone. This crisis impacted each individual differently. As a result, a search began for other parallel or alternative frameworks to the national structure, while limiting the scope to the university itself. It was impossible to organize nationally before locally on the level of every university, and setting the foundations for a union movement from within. This presented another opportunity, the organizational framework on the university level.^[lxiii] However, this too faced substantial challenges.

The Virtual Space, COVID-19, and the Beirut Port Blast

Since the inception of the initiative, it seemed that WhatsApp was the main platform used for discussions and dissemination of invitations. However, this mechanism negatively affected the general course of the movement. WhatsApp, in fact, formed an open gathering space, leaving the door open for those with no direct capacity or who had never participated in founding meetings in universities, yet whose voices were heard within these groups and influenced the discussions directly. The other issue lies in the group setting in WhatsApp. It was not an appropriate space for constructive discussions. Most times, particularly after the popular movement subsided, “a large number of irrelevant messages would be circulated, sometimes even misleading messages...this does not contribute to constructive discussions but rather to confusion. And so, the groups became a waste of time.”^[lxiv] Some tried to replace it with more personal and private initiation meetings on Zoom. But the experience did not allow for side discussions like in-person meetings that remove obstacles. According to one of the professors, “if there was a dispute in person and an attendee left the meeting, we can always follow them, speak with them, and try to convince them to return to the meeting, which is impossible on Zoom.”^[lxv] This hindered the efforts to organize as COVID-19 waves hit the country and caused lockdowns.



However, in addition to the initiative emerging as a response or continuation of public political context (the popular movement), the union experience also faced many issues that were out of its control, such as the economic crisis or the Beirut Port blast. All of these events combined weakened the initiative. For example, a group of professors from Saint-Joseph University were supposed to present bylaws, but the plan was abruptly terminated for many reasons, such as the Beirut Port blast. It is also worth noting that, as the economic crisis in Lebanon intensified, the initiative turned from union action and advocacy to humanitarian work, as requested by certain activists. Certain groups worked on providing food and medicine to people in need. Some of these initiatives quickly veered to a “religious” direction of helping the poor and such, despite the numerous attempts to move from the “charity” perspective into solidarity, a difficult concept to think about in the light of a rapidly-progressing crisis.[\[lxvi\]](#)

Conclusion

This paper addresses the reality of independent professional associations in Lebanon. It studies the case of the OEA, and examined how the opposition forces defeated mainstream parties. It also highlighted the attempt to form an association for professionals and the experience of university professors. Both cases demonstrate the importance of organizing, as well as the clear differences between the two experiences. The first being an experience based on past trials, cumulated over the years. It shows how the joint efforts of people with experience and the energy and enthusiasm of the youth could lead to victory and an exemplary level of organization. The second experience proves that it is difficult to organize in the midst of a popular movement. It also shows that it is impossible to agree on objectives if the movement lacks leadership and clear values. In conclusion, cumulative efforts are very necessary, but so is providing space for organizations and discussions that are aimed at reconciling different perspectives and reinforcing trust factors among activists and other actors in the movement. This is one of the most important ingredients of union success. In contrast, the paper notes that new experiences need more time, however hard it may be to keep their distance and shield themselves from external events. As such, we must think of experiences as long-term, cumulative efforts rather than spur-of-the-moment



ideas to shadow popular movements.

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[iii] Bou Khater, Lea, and Rima Majed. "Lebanon's 2019 October Revolution: Who Mobilized and Why." *Asfari institute for civil society and citizenship* (2020), p.15. http://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/leb-oct-rev_-v.1.3-digital.pdf

[iv] Khater, Lea Bou. "Lebanon's October 2019 Revolution: Inquiry into Recomposing Labor's Power." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 464-472.

[v] El-Kak, Nadim. Alternative Labor Unions in Lebanon: Comparative Reflections and Lessons, The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies, April 2021, <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=342>

[vi] Approximately 55% of the workforce in Lebanon is informal, contributing directly to its dispersion and inability, or even unwillingness, to become organised.

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[xii] Dølerud, Magnus. "The Anti-war Movement in Lebanon, 1975–1990." In *The Routledge History of World Peace Since 1750*, pp. 296-306. Routledge, 2018; Achcar, Paul. "Perspective of a Public Space Renaissance based on Peace Movements", in Beyhum Nabil (dir.), Rebuilding Beirut: Bets on the Possible, Lyon, Etudes sur Le Monde Arabe Collection, n=5, p.319-330.

[xiii]

<https://www.almayadeen.net/files/778331/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%87%D9%82%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-->

[xiv] Scala, Michele. "Clientelism vs. Protesting: The Example of the Mobilisation of Spinneys Workers in Lebanon. *Confluences Méditerranées* 1 (2015): 113-123

[xv] Kobaissy, Farah "Organising Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon." *International Union Rights* 22, no. 4 (2015): 22-23.

[xvi] Jamil Mouawad and Paul Achcar, "One Year into Lebanon's "17 October Uprising": Is There a Reason to Celebrate?", Arab Reform Initiative, 26 October 2020.

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[xvii] Interview with a university professor, Beirut, 10 October 2020.



[xviii] The following unions (for the legal profession, veterinary medicine, legal midwifery, and nursing) only allow Lebanese nationals to practice the professions. Other unions, despite allowing non-Lebanese to practice the profession, have set conditions that may be impossible for some (like the Palestinians), particularly the condition of reciprocity and having the right to practice the profession in their country of origin.

[xix] Adopted on 9 July 1948 by the General Conference of the International Labor Organization, in its thirty-first session.

[xx] Interview with activist and journalist Paul Achcar on WhatsApp, 15 March 2021.

[xxi] Interview with Abir Saksouk, Architect, Zoom, 26 March 2021.

[xxii] “The Independent Professional Choice” included an array of members close to mainstream parties (Future Movement, Hezbollah...)

[xxiii] Interview with Imad Amer, Architect, Zoom, 9 February 2021.

[xxiv] Interview with Imad Amer, Engineer, from the rights group *LiHaki* (My Rights) and organiser in “The Order Revolts” movement.

[xxv] Press conference on 7 April 2017, Jad Tabet, *Naqabati* (My Union) candidate for president of the OEA in Beirut addresses engineers affiliated to parties.

[xxvi] Interview with Abir Saksouk, Zoom, 26 March 2021.

[xxvii] Raed Abou Hamda, Lessons Learned from “The Order Revolts”: Victories in Numbers and Methodology, Megaphone, 23 July 2021. See link:

<https://megaphone.news/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA>

[xxviii] Saksouk, Abir. “The Order Revolts” and the History of the OEA Elections, Megaphone, 17 July 2021. See link:

<https://megaphone.news/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA>



D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8

[xxix] Saksouk, Abir; Abdel Khalek, Yara; and Amer Imad: “The OEA in Beirut: The Historical Context and the Union Reality”, in Tools of Mobilisation and Protesting post-Arab Spring as Records of Transnational Actions, p.60-73.

https://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/policy_papers_ar_v.3.4-digital.pdf

[xxx] Ibid.

[xxxi] Paul Achcar, “Aref Yassine: The Man from Down Under”, Megaphone, 14 July 2021.

[xxxii] Hoda Hobeich, “Tabet to Al-Modon: The OEA became a Tool to Turn a Profit, Al-Modon, 23 February 2017.

<https://www.almodon.com/politics/2017/2/23/%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9>

[xxxiii] The first syndicate elections under the rule of President Michel Aoun. Jad Tabet, in addition to his social and professional capital (his name and personality played a big role, same for Assem Salam earlier), greatly benefitted from the conflict of interests between the traditional parties. He won the presidency while his list (Naqabati) lost. As such, the traditional parties kept the syndicate without its president.

[xxxiv] Interview with Imad Amer, Zoom, 9 February 2021.

[xxxv] Interview with Imad Amer, Zoom, 9 February 2021.

[xxxvi] Interview with Imad Amer, Zoom, 9 February 2021.

[xxxvii] Interview with Imad Amer, Zoom, 9 February 2021.



[xxxviii] Interview with Imad Amer, Zoom, 9 February 2021.

[xxxix] Saksouk, Abir; Abdel Khalek, Yara; and Amer Imad: “The OEA in Beirut: The Historical Context and the Union Reality”, in Tools of Mobilisation and Protesting post-Arab Spring as Records of Transnational Actions, p.60-73.

https://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/policy_papers_ar_v.3.4-digital.pdf

[xl] Interview with Abir Saksouk, Zoom, 26 March 2021.

[xli] Saksouk, Abir; Abdel Khalek, Yara; and Amer Imad: “The OEA in Beirut: The Historical Context and the Union Reality”, in Tools of Mobilisation and Protesting post-Arab Spring as Records of Transnational Actions, p.60-73.

https://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/policy_papers_ar_v.3.4-digital.pdf

[xlii] Interview with Abir Saksouk, Zoom, 26 March 2021.

[xliii] Saksouk, Abir; Abdel Khalek, Yara; and Amer Imad: “The OEA in Beirut: The Historical Context and the Union Reality”, in Tools of Mobilisation and Protesting post-Arab Spring as Records of Transnational Actions, p.60-73.

https://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/policy_papers_ar_v.3.4-digital.pdf

[xliv] Saksouk, Abir; Abdel Khalek, Yara; and Amer Imad: “The OEA in Beirut: The Historical Context and the Union Reality”, in Tools of Mobilisation and Protesting post-Arab Spring as Records of Transnational Actions, p.60-73.

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[xlv] Achcar, Paul. Aref Yassine: The Man from Humble Beginnings. *Megaphone*, 14 July 2021.

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[xlviii] About the campaign. See: “The Order Revolts” – DRI Lebanon.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQLVjCFdXZ8>

[xlix] As follows: *Beirut Madinati*, *Jal El Dib*, *Tajadod Democrazi* Movement, *Khat Ahmar*, *Saida wal Jiwar*, *Ammiyat 17 Teshrin*, *Lubnan an Jadid*, *Wadi Al-Tim* Group, LAP – Engineers, Citizens in a State, Secular Group in the Engineering Sector, Anti-Corruption Popular Observatory, *Mentechrine*, *Tahalof Watani*, *Lubnan Hawiyati*, *Hawa Teshrin*, Lebanese Communist Party, *Chouf wa Aley*, National Bloc, *Likaa Mehani Handasi*, IEA.

[l] Including: The Lebanese Kataeb Party, Independence Movement, *Khat Ahmar*, *Takadom* Party, *Likaa Teshrin*, *Ammiyat 17 Teshrin*, *Nabad al Janub*, Rebels, *Tajamo’ Muwakabat Al Thawra*, Akkar Revolutionaries Group, Northern Revolutionaries Union.

[li] Foz, Nader. The Order Revolts and the Lebanese Opposition Front Join Forces during the OEA Elections. *Al-Modon*, 25 June 2021.

[lii] Interview with Ghassan Issa, Medical Doctor, Zoom, 9 October 2020.

[liii] Some of the objectives set by one of the association’s founders Dr Ghassan Issa (Interview with Ghassan Issa, Medical Doctor, Zoom, 9 October 2021).

[liv] For example, many journalists objected to forming an “alternative press union” considering it a failure to reclaim the Lebanese Press Syndicate from the ruling class.



[lv] Interview with Ghassan Issa, Medical Doctor, Zoom, 9 October 2020.

[lvi] Independent University Professors Association, 23 October 2019.

[lvii] 23 October 2019.

[lviii] Interview with Jihad Nammour, University Professor, Zoom, 13 February 2021.

[lix] Interview with Nizar Hariri, University Professor, Zoom, 16 March 2021.

[lx] Interview with Nizar Hariri, University Professor, Zoom, 16 March 2021.

[lxii] Interview with a university professor, Beirut, 20 April 2021.

[lxiii] Interview with Jihad Nammour, University Professor, Zoom, 13 February 2021.

[lxviii] An organizational attempt within Saint-Joseph University.

[lxiv] Interview with Nizar Hariri, University Professor, Zoom, 16 March 2021.

[lxv] Interview with Nizar Hariri, University Professor, Zoom, 16 March 2021.

[lxvi] For example, assistance targeted 100 families at first and went on to reach 300 families.



About the author



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Jamil Mouawad is a Senior Fellow at the Arab Reform Initiative in charge of the independent professional associations project in the Arab world. He is also a lecturer in politics at the American University of Beirut, where he teaches courses in Public Policy, Political Science and Lebanese politics. He holds a PhD in politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He is a former Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence.

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