What is a Political Worker? Leadership & Leaderlessness in Lebanon's Independence Intifada

by

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Abstract: What is a Political Worker? Leadership & Leaderlessness in Lebanon's Independence Intifada

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There have been scholarly advances in terms of situating "leadership" in the larger map of other structural and dynamic conditions of mobilization; nevertheless, these contributions have not sealed the debate regarding the emergence and manifestation of leadership and initiative in relatively "leaderless environments", especially those which have clear shortcomings on the level of institutional politics. After dissecting the conceptual and empirical debate within the leadership literature in social movement studies, I utilize a Gramscian framework to present the concept of "political workers" as a theoretical and methodological instrument to observe the ways in which the "political biographies" and day-to-day labor of particular actors can shape an alternative "common sense". I make use of empirical illustrations, particularly from in-depth semi-structured interviews, to sketch the case of non-sectarian actors who participated in Lebanon's 2005 Independence Intifada, further elaborating four elements of political work: conceptions of sovereignty, alliances, organizational factors, and moral leadership.

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1.0 Introduction

In early 2005, a wave of protests and demonstrations swept Lebanon in opposition to the military presence of the Syrian regime. These contentious events climaxed on the "big political moment" of 14th of March, when hundreds of thousands of protesters occupied Central Beirut. Taking note of the diverse components of what is often dubbed the "Independence Intifada", non-sectarian activists, intellectuals, and political forces took part in this increasingly polarizing struggle.

When delving into the sociology, history, and political science literature on leadership, it is clear that a series of intellectual transformations have been occurring with regard to the various theoretical models and general explanations which situate leadership as a factor in explaining the development of social movements. Conceptually, what are the attributes of a political worker in accordance with frames utilized in the social movement leadership literature and Gramscian optics? Empirically, how does this conception translate and manifest amongst "non-sectarian" movements in Lebanon?

From traditional historical narratives over-emphasizing the role of particular Presidents, Kings, and general State leaders (these narratives are still found in the

world of journalism and nonfiction) to the critique of “Great Man” history by sociologists who have introduced structuralist analysis of revolutions (i.e. analyses which underline the impact of wider socio-economic conditions and macro-processes), the potential for constructing a rigorous conceptualization of leadership can get lost between these “dichotomous” analytical positions (Ogburn, 1926; Skocpol, 1994).

While there have been scholarly advances in terms of situating “leadership” in the larger map of other structural and dynamic conditions of mobilization, the definitional conceptualization of leadership is even more contested. In this piece, I attempt to survey the various attitudes on the defining parameters of leadership within the literature: what separates leaders from other movement organizers? How are leaders perceived by other participants and the general sympathetic populace? What are certain practices expected of leaders within a movement? I then propose an alternative theoretical framing, to which I attach potential empirical value in certain contexts.

Although some scholars have schematized leadership in the "differential" sense, i.e. by highlighting ways in which leaders differ from the rest of the activist population, others have studied "leadership tasks" and forms of labor initiated by a variety of activists. These positions are elaborated in later sections; the latter

also inspires my understanding of "political workers", a more fluid category of movement participants who pursue these leadership tasks and build such experiences via combining elements of intellectual and practical labor; "leadership" hence emerges out of the will of conscious and deliberate political practice. "Political work", in this sense, is not interpreted as "any form of organizational legwork", but about the ways in which day-to-day practices conducted by individual political workers shape organizational relations, outcomes, discursive products, and consequently, a wider common sense. Finally, I relate this conceptual work back to the context of Lebanon, putting forth basic illustrations, informed by semi-structured interviews conducted with a variety of actors, on the ways in which political labor manifested prior to the country's 2005 "Independence Intifada". Nevertheless, a more comprehensive empirical and case-specific analysis will be shared in a separate paper, given that this is reserved for conceptual expansion.

Accordingly, I propose that the conceptualisation of "political workers" can potentially provide for a useful framework and understanding of how leadership manifests and is distributed across invested persons in emerging movements in small countries, particularly those in which oppositional politics hasn't reached a specific level of institutionalization. I utilized the term "non-sectarian" to describe the subgroup of actors under study defined by their lack of reliance on a particular

sect-based background in their mobilizing strategies, accompanied by their capacity to incorporate/attract leaders and members from a variety of cultural pools. They also distanced themselves from the sectarian frame when outlining their overall political objectives & discursive priorities. Specifically, I believe a loose categorization/definitional delimitation of movement initiative, leadership, and labor informed by Gramscian optics can be of some empirical utility, particularly when utilized as a tool which sketches the biographical development of these “workers”.

2.0 Literature review: Leadership in social movement studies

In this review, I specify two themes found relevant in the “social movement leadership” literature: (1) ways in which scholars have specified leaders in a differential manner (i.e. comparing them [their characters, types, and “essential” features] to the rest of the political-social actor population), and (2) studies which attempt to locate and examine “quality political work” by focusing on the tasks, labor components, day-to-day practices of movement participants which pertain to what is often called “leadership” in more horizontal and autonomous movements (or movements which generally allow for such direct action).

Dimensions of leadership-follower demarcations

Veltmeyer & Petras (2002) provide a classic understanding of how leadership is characterized by a set of "rules" which concern the "characters" of “leaders”. Leadership is hence boxed into definitional parameters which emphasize experience, deeply rooted connections with the general populace, and the ability to create "doers" which push the movement forward. Meanwhile, Russel (2007) emphasizes the role of activist leadership in avoiding shortsighted visions, appealing to a larger public, constructing a movement identity, and building organizational legitimacy over time. Similar hypotheses emerge from case studies which create a specialized separation between different types of leadership: "managerial" versus "charismatic” leaders; “mobilizers” versus “articulators”; “platform” versus “organizational” leaders (Weed, 1993; Reger, 2007; Kretschmer & Meyer, 2007; Morris and Staggenborg, 2004).

In a very interesting study, Bob and Nepstad (2007) embolden this separation by comparing the implications of assassinating different types of leaders, in which the assassination of prophetic leaders may help develop movements rather than hinder them, as opposed to assassinating leaders whose labor is instrumental for movement sustainability. On the other hand, in a different piece, the authors emphasize the importance of locating a relational dynamic between members and

leaders, however retaining the "unique capacity" of leaders to garner social capital, mobilize third parties, and interpret and respond to threats and opportunities (Bob & Nepstad, 2007).

On that particular note, Han et al. (2011) specify the importance of “quality leadership” when assessing particular social movement outcomes on the level of civic organizations, emphasizing further the characteristics of pursuing skilled commitment, enabling sub-leaders and overall participants, and forwarding a motivational practice capable of sustaining action in the long run. Another piece by Andrews et al. (2010) stresses leaders’ capacity to embolden and strengthen public recognition and the ability to exploit existing resources in an efficient and productive manner. On the other hand, Morris and Staggenborg (2004) provide fascinating insights on how leaders emerge from different indigenous institutions and communities, each of which can produce a “different” set of leaders who use various tools to articulate their frames and exploit political opportunities. Meanwhile, a more critical understanding of leadership presented by Choi-Fitzpatrick (2015) scrutinizes the issue of leaders silencing debate in the hopes of “getting the engine rolling" and completing movement work. Hence, there empirically exists a disposition by which traditional leaders may not encourage the creative flow of ideas, preferring instead a more direct and quick authority-labor dynamic between leaders and members.

Nevertheless, within this analytical mode of examining leadership exists a more horizontal understanding which prioritizes the impact of “sub-leaders” within movements by further scrutinizing micro-processes of recruitment, initiation, and political will (Ehrhardt, 2020). The idea of secondary leadership emerging, not via authority, but by the capacity to persuade movement participants is found in early scholarship (Eichler, 1977). According to Eichler, “open access leadership” is primarily based on the bottom-up efforts of emerging secondary leaders navigating the movement’s dominant discursive and ideological field. I believe such a concept closely approaches further adaptations outlined in later sections in the paper.

Leadership as tasks, labor, and practices

In a slightly different light, leadership has not always been based on clear-cut categorizations between one “movement character” and “another”; on the contrary, leadership can be analyzed as a set of tasks and practices exercised by a wide range of movement actors. One fascinating and explicit case study comparison is the one conducted by Einwohner (2007), who observes ways in which authority work is performed in different settings, especially in settings

which disfavor the establishment of clear hierarchical organizations and apparatuses. Ganz & McKenna (2018) make a similar reference to leadership as a "set of practices", emphasizing the need for "action" to be strategic, focused, tactical, and well-executed to be considered "leaderful".

Rohlinger & Gaulden (2017) and Reger (2007) make their analytical usage of "leadership tasks" even more explicit, suggesting that "making leading tasks, rather than leaders, central to analyses helps scholars empirically assess who is doing leadership work, what leading tasks these individuals take on, and how often they engage in these tasks." This fixation on action, rather than personalities, allows scholars to decenter certain figures who, despite playing a key communicative and performative role, are not necessarily the primary causal links behind movement action. In a rather "normative" piece in which Western (2014) calls for reevaluating the anarchist position of leadership, the author proposes an understanding of leadership which is "autonomist", one that is further amplified by the development of the digital sphere and the pursuit of action, as opposed to remaining in the theoretical domain. Chalcraft (2012) studies the adaptation of horizontalism to the Middle Eastern context, in which the digital sphere has allowed for a new repertoire of bottom-up political practices. He mentions the consequences of such leaderlessness, not solely on the methods through which decisions are made, but also on the process by which a

revolutionary program emerges. On the other hand, Latif (2022) provides the wider political atmosphere navigating the "structurelessness" of the the 2011 Egyptian revolution, citing an erratic and chaotic environment which lacks a "unified" leadership, echoing the crisis of horizontal movements as they emerged in such a climax (p. 32).

Freeman (1972) and Ganz (2010) delve more into what these tasks may look like, proposing a set of practices which incorporate the emotional, managerial, and framing-based labor needed to induce action, hope, responsibility, and a sense of urgency, particularly when the overall atmosphere is dominated by sentiments of apathy, self-doubt, and fear. Costanza-Chock (2006) demonstrates how these practices and tools transform in the context of the digital era. Meanwhile, an empirically-rich case study by Robnett (1996) on the role of African-American women in the civil rights movements elaborates the internal processes of leadership which were not necessarily visible when compared to the public presence of prevalent male leaders such as Martin Luther King. "Informal leadership", practiced by these women activists, is categorized as "bridging"; while such actors are not recognized as conventional "leaders" within the movement, the practices and tasks they put forth (namely frame amplification and interpretation) become ultimately instrumental for movement progress and coordination. Finally, Diani (2003) studies the fascinating and conflicting task of

“brokerage”, commonly pursued by new social movement leaders who do not necessarily enjoy a traditional authoritative privilege in the movement. By linking networks together, brokers are interpreted as politically-trained cadres with the capacity to link social movement organizations with third parties, subsequently utilizing and continuously building on personal and symbolic capital.

Circling back to social movement growth: Morris’ indigenous institutions

Leadership, even when understood as a set of tasks, is first and foremost a movement resource. Given that social movement scholars have expanded beyond “political process theory” (PPT) is assessing movement dynamics, criticizing its reliance on invariant models and its fixation on "structures," which undermines understanding the role of agency in social movements (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999, p. 42), I recall the utility of “indigenous” versions of resource mobilization theory (RMT) highlight the importance of charisma, institutional ties, and strategies executed by marginalized groups for movement growth and societal impact. Emphasizing movement agency, subsequent works delve into frame lifting, tactical solutions, leadership, and movement action (Morris, 1984, p. 283; Morris, 2000; Bloom, 2015). To build on Morris’ study of indigenous institutions, I insist that a reconceptualization of leadership as a prime movement resource is a

necessary step to revise how political labor induces movement development and wider socio-political transformations.

3.0 Political workers: A Gramscian intervention

In order to define my conceptual framework of "political workers", I build on two different traditions and contributions to the literature on bottom-up politics: (1) Gramsci's (1973) examination of the role of intellectuals and (2) Bamyeh's (2012) adaptation of the term "organic intellectuals". Gramsci poses essential critiques of the phenomenon of "traditional intellectuals" who embody a social class of their own, instead expanding on the role of "organic intellectuals" as providers of theory, ideology, justification, and normative/moral leadership for a specific social class. In the contemporary social movement literature, this component of intellectual work may often be understood as "framing". An interesting added value in the Gramscian framework, however, is that intellectual labor is seen as a practice pursued by anyone with political will, rather than a specialized minority.

In this study, I choose not to indulge in the debate of what characterizes the "intellectual". Instead, I further tackle and elaborate on the **organizational** and **power-building** role of "organic intellectuals". These very "intellectuals", via their activity centered on orienting political objectives, constructing a new organizational *and* social common sense, resolving conflict, and persuading potential cadres of their prime motivations, are part and parcel of the machine of organized political labor. To critically build on Gramsci, I suggest that

highlighting the role of organic intellectuals in terms of their activities, production, and capacity to “form or shift” “common sense” requires definitional flexibility regarding the relationship between the “intellectual” and “social class”. Bamyeh (2012) provides an amendment to the concept of “organic intellectual” in the pursuit of understanding the aforementioned relationship in a more malleable sense, alongside providing a more inclusive delimitation of “social class”. In other words, I first prioritize the organic intellectual’s “intellectual function”, not their class identity.

Hence, while the contemporary literature on "organic intellectuals" has specified the concept in the context of a particular role to be fulfilled by a specific movement "officer" (i.e. the "intellectual"), Gramsci (1973, p. 132) affirms a more malleable understanding of organic intellectuals who permeate the political space in a variety of functions - these "intellectuals" pursue organizational directive work, blurring the lines between their involvement vis-a-vis that of “other” organizers. This is further affirmed by his refusal to constrain the role of organic intellectuals to that of "movement orators", pushing against a "technocratic" understanding of a division of roles between cadres - political “talent” is henceforth not necessarily restricted to one or few “departments”, but is instead approached in a holistic manner.

On that note, “political workers” borrow a lot of characteristics and behaviors from this conceptual adaptation of “organic intellectuals” who refuse the constrained positioning of “traditional intellectuals”. However, “political workers” build on “organic intellectuals” to incorporate a much more expansive application of *labor*, i.e. the labor of persuasion, negotiation, recruitment, and the instilling of public emotion (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004, p. 171; Gramsci, p. 132). Their “leadership” is not necessarily public or official, and fulfilling their role doesn’t necessitate a high-ranking or highly visible position within the organization of which they are a part - it simply necessitates their labor. While these workers tend to subscribe to a particular theoretical paradigm for their work, or "theory of change", the product of their labor does not usually match their expectations. Expected products include but aren't restricted to discourse popularization, electoral advancements, protest accumulation, movement expansion, and the expansion of their own individual influence and share of the political space, regardless of any self-proclaimed "ideological" or "collective pursuit". It’s also crucial to underline the dialectical nature of the political worker; as they are not only actors who “produce”, but are themselves constantly being “produced” by the development of their own movement structures and the wider movement atmosphere which surrounds them.

Given the discursive focus of the products of “political workers”, we rely on Alfred Schutz’s concept of “common sense”, known and elaborated in Gramsci’s work. It encompasses an understanding of beings as both individuals and as part of a larger whole, incorporating characteristics of discourse which center around “commonality”, “anonymity”, and “being taken for granted”, while also implying social aspects like “belongingness” and “shared understanding” (Trujillo, 2021). Building on Schutz positions us to stress social spaces as mediums via which the production of meaning and language is flexible, continuous, free, and open-ended in terms of popular and imaginative interpretation.

It encompasses the idea of "being-with," or "Mitsein," emphasizing the existential foundation of community and interpersonal relationships. "Πρᾶξῐς" refers to daily activities and engagements, rooted in a lived understanding of things encountered in their essence and relation to human existence. Together, "κοινὴ πρᾶξῐς" represents typical ways of knowing, doing, and speaking, encompassing mundane experiences and everyday understanding.

Nevertheless, it’s crucial to emphasize that these workers *do* make these subjective claims, and attempt to instill trust in their capacity to produce a collective will capable of shifting power relations (Gramsci, p. 427). The purpose of this description is not to "evaluate" movement members; in other words,

"political workers" is not a judgment classification, but a rough sociological classification concerned with a *general* disposition revolving around the goals, acts, capacity, and desires of a select group of movement participants. Considering the term a rough categorization, not all actors classified as "political workers" fulfill all of the aforementioned roles.

To reiterate, there is a particular analytical utility to using the term to better understand the "dynamics of motion" of social movements. This is especially relevant in settings where leadership is neither obvious nor clear, or when the loudest of self-proclaimed leaders skew our examination of movement dynamics at the expense of a more robust, critical dissection of "invisible" political labor. Finally, one may ask how this emphasis on "labor" differs from the thesis proposed by studies emphasizing "leadership tasks". Quite simply - instead of solely focusing on labor as a set of tasks, we propose an analysis of political labor which cannot be dissociated from the character of the laborer, i.e. their very biography and individual "trace" on the discursive and organizational practice of bottom-up politics. Finally, not all political work is leadership, but analyzing the base components of movements by examining political workers allows us to locate leadership in "leaderless" environments, i.e. particularly in environments where leadership is in crisis.

Furthermore, such an understanding of leadership resonates with Ganz's (2008; 2000) usage of "leadership teams", which he centers as an instrumental idea to assess the performance of electoral campaigns and political groups which rely on a number of core organizers, despite the need for the general public to focus primarily on "leading figures" which mask the consequential importance of the overall team. As mentioned prior, the concept of "political workers" does stress on the need for a biographical and personalistic reasoning behind participant involvement and overall normative and pragmatic rationale. In other words, while this analytical disposition builds on Ganz's relational and interactive analysis of teams, it does further stress the need to underline the "stories" of "workers" whose labor and subsequent development compensate for wider collective and institutionalized forms of organizational leadership.

In the midst of the institutional power asymmetry which exists between ruling class factions and bottom-up “alternative” movements across cases, political workers aligned with the latter are unable to exert an executive power function. Instead, they find themselves engaging in a discursive struggle aimed primarily at shifting the predominant conceptions, narratives, norms, and moral priorities of their societies. Nevertheless, while the product of their work is discursive, the labor itself involved organizational and bloc-building tools. In other words, “political workers” deviate or rather specify the broader category of “social

movement actors” based on two aspects: (1) a historical, contextual aspect which accounts for a crisis of leadership and institutions in particular social situations and countries, specifically with regards to both top-down and bottom-up conditions inhibiting the formation of “alternative” mass-based political organizations capable of competing with sect-based associations primarily established in the 20th century, (2) a “product aspect” which accounts for the primary contribution of these political workers: the production of discourse, stories, and emotional sentiments, paving the way towards the construction of an “alternative common sense”. These categories of political labor are further demonstrated by the case of Lebanon, outlined in the next section.

4.0 Popular currents in Lebanon's Independence Intifada: A brief case illustration

Background: Pax-Syriana hegemony in post-war Lebanon

Lebanon is a country governed by a sectarian system, i.e. a power-sharing mode of governance which mediates between the interests of sectarian-religious leaders who respond to "different" constituencies (Weiss, 2009). Accompanied by a rent-based neoliberal economic system primarily centered on unproductive sectors, monopoly structures, and client-patron networks sponsored by sectarian leaders themselves (Baumann, 2012), "leadership" in the country has thus been understood primarily as a socio-economic, tribal, and identitarian-authoritative relationship between a number of leaders and their constituents. Nevertheless, it would be reductionist to suggest that there are no outliers to this "rule", especially as recent scholarship has highlighted the role of leftist, democratic, and liberal cross-sectarian factions in the country with an alternative function to its leadership, one that begins to mirror the tool set generally scrutinized in the global social movement scholarship (Haugbolle, 2013; Halawi & Salloukh, 2020).

More importantly, since the 1990s, a new phase in Lebanese history *officially* turned the page of the civil war[1]; accordingly, Syria's mandate was informed by a hegemonic discourse constituting several layers and levels. On the domestic level, intra-elite rhetoric promoted a form of *unity-based* nationalism enforced by the Syrian regime - expressions of Lebanon and Syria encompassing "one national unit" were clearly disseminated in the media and speeches of different loyalist politicians (Saseen, 1990, p. 68; Baumann, 2012, p. 83). This was accompanied by an instilled atmosphere of "reconstructionist" renewal (primarily of Beirut's centre) fixated on erasing civil war "memory"; this manifested in the neoliberal project of Syria's former ally, businessman and politician Rafic al-Hariri (Baumann, 2012, p. 104).

Several interview participants suggested that Israel's occupation of both South Lebanon and the Golan Heights served as an opportunity to embolden the portrayal of an inseparable Syria-Lebanon, signified by the slogan *wehdet al-masar wal-maseer* ("the unity of path and fate"). Induced by both inconsistent pan-Arabist and pan-Syrianist sentiments, this entailed that the process of

[1] The Lebanese civil war lasted for 15 years, between 1975 and 1990. It was sparked for a variety of reasons, including but not restricted to the presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), imbalances in the sectarian system (in which Christian Maronites were given an edge over Muslims and other sects), economic inequalities, and competing conceptions which concern Lebanon's identity. It was also amplified by an Israeli invasion to counter the PLO and a Syrian intervention in support of the PLO's adversaries, the Lebanese Front (representing the Christian Right).

negotiating with Israel *ought* to be, in principle, a “collective” one (Knudsen, 2005, p. 11-12; El-Husseini, 2012, p. 195). Nevertheless, other interviewees further noted that, pragmatically, the regime portrayed such a chauvinistic unionism as one that was “necessary but temporary”. In practice, due to the asymmetric relations of power between the two entities, implementing such a foreign policy constrained decision-making in the hands of Syria and its immediate allies. It is worth noting that these domestic and geopolitical categories constantly intersect, and so minority actors initially opposed to the occupation, primarily from the Maronite population, were “externalized” as violating collective national security and “pan-Arabism”, consequently framed as “serving the interests” of an enemy country (El-Husseini, 2012, p. 201). The vast majority of participants in this study concur with this characterization, repeatedly mentioning the abuse of the “treason card”. Bottom-up actors are thus reduced by the State and its regional patron to “agents” of external “imperialist” forces protecting Israel and destabilizing Lebanon’s “pan-Arabist relationship” with a “sister” country i.e. Syria (El-Husseini, 2012, p. 196).

On the other hand, in both the media and political statements, the Syrian regime framed the (more marginal) “liberal left” in a different light, one not primarily covered in the literature. As opposed to the Maronite-majority right-wing formations with past ties with Israel, the wide range of relatively older leftists

who increasingly opposed the mandate formerly took part in national resistance groups against the Israeli invasion of 1982. Accordingly, they were recurrently portrayed as hardened supporters of the late PLO leader Yasser Arafat. In fact, 8 participants suggested that since major sections of the liberal-left backed Arafat's halting of Syria's "co-optation of the Palestinian struggle" (Lawson, 1988, p. 165), painting them with an "Arafatist" coloring was perceived to have been convenient for the Syrian regime due to the late PLO leader's considerably unpopular concessions (especially in circles within the regime's vicinity of influence) during the Oslo Accords of 1993. Overall, in all stages within the duration of its power grip on the country, despite espousing ideals of national unity, securitization, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism to substantiate its control over the country, the pro-Syria military and political ruling class faced significant social, political, and cultural challenges which paved the way for the Syrian withdrawal of April 2005.

Lebanon's political workers: Avenues to construct a new common sense

This analysis centers "political labor" with respect to three categories: conception (frames), organization, and alliances. Conception generally refers to the

normative, political readings and ideological directions through which these groups/individuals characterized the situation at hand. Organization entails the modes of collaboration, leadership, teamwork, and emotional investment within particular participatory frameworks. Finally, strategic considerations, alliances, and short-term objectives require cross-movement collaboration aimed at forwarding a "serious" alternative to the ruling hegemony via an "ensemble of ideas and social relations" at a particularly historical moment of social mobilization (Hawley, 1980, p. 586). On one hand, what we list and elaborate here are products of the workers under the study; on another hand, they also seemingly represent the physical and experiential "factories" through which these political workers grow, learn, and socialize politically. However, the dialectical relationship between producing and "being produced" requires further study, both empirically and conceptually, which goes beyond the function and objectives of this paper.

In other words, the purpose of this analysis is not simply to outline or detail the discursive, organizational, and bloc-building packages utilized by political workers in this particular substantive context, but also to use the case of the 2005 Independence Intifada to better clarify the conceptual boundaries of political work, elaborating further the activities and day-to-day practices "political workers" engage in to exploit rare political opportunities. This categorization of

political labor is informed by the semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with participants listed in the appendix.

<u>Conception</u>: Intellectual, moral conceptions and normative values were instrumental in recreating what left-liberal politics and the wider "non-confessional" ethical prism entailed in those circumstances. Subsequently, 14 participants proudly associated themselves with the promotion of a confrontational discourse unashamed of a "liberal inclusivity" and the incorporation of struggles revolving around non-class identities, particularly against authoritarianism. While such a transformation encompassed individual intellectuals and cultural spheres, they increasingly grew prominent in more organized socio-political formations following the Israeli withdrawal in the year 2000. Sympathies directed towards a pro-sovereignty critique vis-a-vis the occupation gradually predominated amongst civic activists, sections of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), and youth groups. The sense of a "renewed" coloring to the Left gradually positioned itself as a moral alternative to what was perceived as "old", "traditional", and "exclusively focused on class and national liberation". The proposed narrative established is that such a renewal allowed formerly rigid ideologues to reexamine their priorities. This was accompanied by extremely antagonistic sentiments towards the Syrian regime, prioritizing this antagonism over "domestic reform". In fact, 13 participants alluded to the

prevalence of an “anti-Syrianism” amongst left-liberal circles at the time. The appeal towards geopolitics has even induced some proclaiming to be on the far-Left to accuse the DLM of “aligning with imperialists” (i.e. the United States) and espousing “right-wing sentiment” (Haugbolle, 2016, p. 71; Mercille, 2010). In that sense, one may suggest that the criticisms directed towards the traditional Left ultimately partly manifested in the “neoliberalization” of the New Left, which increasingly conceded on its former priorities of social and economic justice given the context at the time.

Moral leadership: (Also understood as “intellectual leadership”) It informs, legitimizes, and "brings life" to the normative frames used by political workers. In fact, 9 participants mentioned that the very credible imagery associated with particular faces provided the movement with a sense of “meaning” and “purpose”. Intellectuals, writers, and leaders known for their socialist and humanist underpinnings, alongside their fierce resistance against the Israeli invasion during the 1980s, softened the polarization induced by the Syrian regime in the early 2000s. While cultural personalities and writers such as Samir Frangieh, Elias Atallah, Elias Khoury, and Naseer Al-Asad were recurrently emphasized and highlighted, assassinated academic and Al-Nahar journalist Samir Kassir was portrayed in an exceptional manner. Malik Mrouwe, a senior journalist, businessman, and former colleague of Kassir, attributed this “exceptionalism” to

Kassir's "harsh and bold pen" and "dreamy" language, stressing his urge to challenge cynicism amongst organizers and intellectuals. In other words, Kassir's sketch of a "society for tomorrow" based on particular political value-based commitments, such as forwarding the idea of an interconnected "pro-solidarity politics" between social movements in Syria and Lebanon, were said to have provided young activists with a sense of enthusiasm and "political charge" to engage in transformative political work. With the availability of almost all of Kassir's articles within the archives of the Samir Kassir Foundation, I found that the thematic range of his contributions included not only critical attitudes on media censorship (Kassir, 1993), the pro-military alternative (Kassir, 1995), and Ba'athist moral platitudes (Kassir, 2000), but also provided a channel of advocacy in favor of systemic change on behalf of bottom-up movements and personalities (Kassir, 1996; 1997; 2001; 2004).

Organization: On one hand, the security state established in the pax-Syriana era was perceived to have killed any chance to create bold political parties, pushing many non-sectarian actors already dissatisfied with their former political experiences towards civil society organizations. Accordingly, a subset of participants appreciated such spaces' capacity to build parallel structures versus clientalist and sectarian networks of advocacy. On another hand, others highlight the issues of excessive professionalization, limits pertinent to funding, roadmap

gaps, and discourse depoliticization. While some expressed approval for CSO issue-based specificity, others condemned it, suggesting it to be a force for fragmentation. In line with Hardig's overall assessment, while it is the case that CSOs and NGOs expanded on shared spaces and an accumulative process of skill-creation, it is also the case that issue-based professionalization did not fulfill the sentiment that these activists belonged to an explicit political community (Hardig, 2011, p. 301). On the level of newly established political parties, such as the Democratic Left Movement and the Democratic Renewal Movement (DLM and DRM), little can be understood about these entities without understanding the internal dynamics of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP). Frustrated with an exclusivist and cabinet-centric decision making process, youth activists within splinter groups such as Communist Students (CS) dissociated from the LCP in the early 2000s, to later merge with other leftist student leaders across universities (formerly part of the "Independent Leftist Groups" (ILG) coalition) to form the youth backbone of the DLM. DLM's party structure, primarily based on local councils, an executive committee, and varying ideological "currents" (or tayyarat), was suggested to have been extensively democratic and participatory in theory, despite practical shortcomings at a later stage. The pluralistic nature of DLM's organizational structure was also contrasted with what former CP member Ali Mourad called the "Bakdashist" tradition of the LCP (i.e. based on the

authoritarian party rule of former Syrian Arab communist leader Khalid Bakdash).

<u>Alliances:</u> The early 2000s witnessed a sizable collaborative effort between left-wing and right-wing youth activists and political parties. For instance, one participant noted that the youth wing of the right-leaning Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) (led by then exiled Maronite leader Michel Aoun) recurrently attended left-leaning rallies organized by the ILG and CS. On the level of political parties and intellectuals possessing more resources and wider reach, national dialogues constituting the Democratic Platform (al-manbar al-democrati) and Qornet Shehwan represented the first attempts to build a cross-sectarian coalition in the pursuit of reassessing relations with the Syrian regime (Choucair, 2005, p. 2). On one hand, given these developments, a few participants who associated themselves with the far-Left suggested that such alliances induced an unnecessary division within leftist forces and marginalized the cause for class struggle and workers' rights. In the pursuit of solidifying ties with xenophobic, neoliberal, and sectarian forces, rhetorical concessions were made by the DLM in favor of supposedly a more "important" and "strategic" battle (based on sovereignty sentiments and rebuilding the state) in which the Left was the weakest link (AbiYaghi, 2012, p. 21). The vast majority of participants highlighted the Syrian regime's intensive control on domestic affairs, to the extent that any quest for

domestic social transformation was rendered “impossible” given the “conditions at the time”. Citing assassinations, recurrent crackdowns, torture, and forms of soft hegemony, youth activist at the time Rana Khoury suggests that calls for social justice, structural radical change, and state-building in the pursuit of protecting the most marginalized required Syrian regime withdrawal, further justifying such forms of “bloc-building”.

5.0 From Lebanon's Independence Intifada to "Political Worker": A biographical adaptation of indigenous institutions

The above analysis provides us not necessarily with a rich empirical understanding of the specific social movement dynamics of non-sectarian workers in post-war Lebanon, but instead clarifies and "brings alive" certain processes which "reinform" the theoretical discussion centered on movement mobilization via an adequate understanding of the "indigenous institutions" at their disposal, particularly references and centering ways in which political workers leverage their (1) social capital, positioning, legacies, charisma, intellectual institutions, and speaking/writing capacities to advance alternative conceptions and leadership, (2) organizational skills and available structures affiliated with past leftist and communist groups and parties, and university spaces, (3) social relations, interpersonal exchanges, and subjective perceptions of one another to mediate difference and form clearly-directed alliances.

By listening to who I argue are the primary enforcers of these indigenous institutions, i.e. political workers, I affirm that a biographical adaptation of these mass mobilizing qualities, energies, and resources associated with social bases remains a crucial response to structuralist interpretations of PPT. The question remains: How can we better understand the dynamic transformation of these institutions and the human resource behind them? How can we provide an in-

depth processual understanding of how these institutions are constructed, activated, sustained, and mobilized across networks and spaces? Both analytically and theoretically, this paper poses biographical examinations of individual "political workers" as key manifestations of indigenous institutions in a context where leadership and organized political practice action is individualized due to a crisis of leadership and adequate organizational and democratic institutions, pushing key subjects to exploit and utilize the intermediary processes which lie between these movement institutions (whether organizational or conceptual) and the wider public sphere. Methodologically, this study also highlights the insights provided by biographies, providing micro-processes about the ways in which discursive gains are achieved or realized. By centering the "stories" of non-sectarian political workers, each interview and focus group discussion provides key insights about the organic links which lie between political labor, subjective perceptions, opportunity structures, mobilizing currents, discourse-production, voter mobilization, & electoral gains.

The insights provided by these empirical illustrations also affirm how I differentiate between the "political worker" and "social movement actor". Understanding the role and consequences of "political work" from a Gramscian sense goes beyond conventional interpretations of movement actors to better amplify **intellectual function and discursive prioritization**; this is not merely an

inherent characteristic of the "political worker" across history, but most particularly a product of today's **digital era**. It is also amplified by the crisis of leadership and the objective weakness of the social infrastructure surrounding these workers, as demonstrated in the Lebanese context.

6.0 Conclusion

In this paper, I present the concept of "political workers" as a way to better understand the "labor of leadership" in a environments which contain a crisis of institutions, democracy, and leadership, i.e. in settings where the authoritative functions of conventional hierarchical models lose legitimacy and/or are in crisis, as is the case with many countries within the Global South. In these contexts, emerging movements do not enjoy the same historical legacy and transition of skills found in indigenous institutions built in the Global North. When not many organizers in different movements call themselves "leaders" or visibly behave as leaders, the concept of "political workers" allows us to engage with biographical research methods which allow us to explain the emergence of movements and the role of these actors in the process in either inhibiting or advancing movement growth via discursive tool sets.

Furthermore, even in settings where conventional and/or electoral leadership is more visible and empirically studied, this term allows for a more robust and inclusive understanding of the impact of other modes of managerial and intellectual "leadership" on movement progression: how much "leaderful" political work is actually being done? How many "political workers" truly exist in a movement? Some bottom-up non-mainstream movements either boast their

membership base or reflect on the unstrategic choices of their visible leaders, but they also end up not considering the value of the "political work" taking place within a movement's “internal kitchen”. Assessing the success or failure of these movements requires a more thorough diagnosis of how labor is divided, strategized, prioritized, and executed.

Nevertheless, when leadership categories are further complicated within grassroots organizations and party politics, the analytical concept of “political workers” may suggest that organizers’ positionings, in practice, are monolithic. In truth, the power dynamics which exist between organizers are constantly transforming in a variety of directions, henceforth producing hierarchical leaderships which ought to be differentiated and examined over time. While “political workers” can be *thematically* specified, “vertical” differentiation is slightly more difficult unless conventional/traditional leadership frameworks are reintroduced into the analysis. This also suggests that there is a need for a deeper and more extensive theoretical and conceptual reflection to ensure that the term is either adjusted for a multitude of cases, or that a set of "sister terms" are able to delineate the gaps demonstrated in this paper.

The paper then delves into the Lebanese case, in which non-sectarian political workers engaged with the civic and political spaces available to them to leverage

their presence and take part in the struggle for Lebanese sovereignty, further contributing to the 2005 popular demonstrations calling for the withdrawal of the Syrian army. I categorize these empirical illustrations according to four elements of political practice: the dissemination of alternative conceptions, the emergence of moral leadership, the innovation of new organizational structures, and the formation of alliances.

While this conceptual expansion outlines both the potential and downsides to the usage of the term, I am eager to read on future scholarship which concerns itself with demystifying the dynamics of grassroots movements in many parts of the world, alongside providing a voice for erased, ambitious subjects who claim the power to transform their world(s).

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Appendix: List of interviewees

Abbas Abou Zeid, former member of Communist Students (CS).

Adib Nehme, former member of Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE).

Ali Mourad, former member of CS.

Ayman Mhanna, former member of Democratic Renewal Movement (DRM).

Dalia Obeid, former member of DLM.

Diala Haidar, former member of AUB No Frontiers (NF).

Fadi Toufic, former member of CS.

Ghassan Makarem, leftist activist.

Houssam Nassif, former member of AUB No Frontiers (NF).

Kamal Yazigi, former activist.

Khaled Saghieh, journalist.

Marc Daou, former member of DLM.

Michael Young, senior journalist (formerly The Daily Star).

Malek Mroue, senior journalist (The Daily Star).

Michel Douaihy, former student activist.

Michel Hajji Georgiou, former student activist.

Misbah Ahdab, former member of DRM.

Nizar Ghanem, former student activist.

Omar Harkous, former leftist activist.

Rabih Al Amine, leftist activist.

Rana Khoury, former member of AUB NF.

Roger Haddad, former youth member of Free Patriotic Movement (FPM).

Shireen Abdallah, former activist.

Tariq Hashem, former leftist activist.

Appendix: Pool of questions

0. What ideological, hegemonic justification do you believe was utilized by the Syrian regime and its allies during the occupation? What slogans did you keep hearing as a participant and observer at the time?

1. Part of the academic literature and popular media have characterized the Independence Intifada as a mobilization of middle class to upper class social forces, even when taking into account the non-sectarian group formations that occurred; how do you think secular forces within Independence Intifada address the interest of poorer classes (and Syrian refugees)?

How can we connect the address or lack of address to political choices that involve collaborating with neoliberal political entities and alliances?

Do you think subaltern workers and poorer sections of society find a space within the various non-sectarian associations, parties, and groups that formed in the late 1990s and the early 2000s?

2. How did you sense the contribution from the moral and intellectual leadership of particular figures (such as Samir Kassir) to the movement's momentum and strategy?

As a participant, did you feel there was a fluid and harmonious connection between the leadership of Kassir, Hawi, and others on one hand, and the social bases they addressed on another? How does this differ from vanguardist interpretations of social struggle? Did you feel a sense of inclusivity that took into account bottom-up decision making?

3. What spheres of society did these movements entrench themselves in order to provide an alternative vision than that of the 'ruling class' and the pax-Syriana ceiling above it? Where do you stand on the controversies, debates, and ideological battles which emerged in NGOs, CSOs, syndicates, and the media with regards to how to address the Syrian mandate?

4. How do you evaluate the concessions made by many of these forces when they aligned themselves with sectarian actors and players? Does this encompass a political strategy that involves creating a unified alliances across various sections of society?

What kind of bodies were founded to establish these forms of cooperation, other than Qornet Shehwan? What were the dynamics involved in the establishment of Al-Manbar Al-Democrati?

5. A lot is attributed to figures and writers like Samir Kassir concerning the permeation of a particular discourse within the media and culture - how did you notice ways in which groups of non-sectarian forces materialized in the cultural and media sphere?

6. When Rafic Hariri was “excluded from the system” first in 1998 and second in 2004, how did non-sectarian alliances prioritize their battles and discourses at that time? How do you rationalize this position?