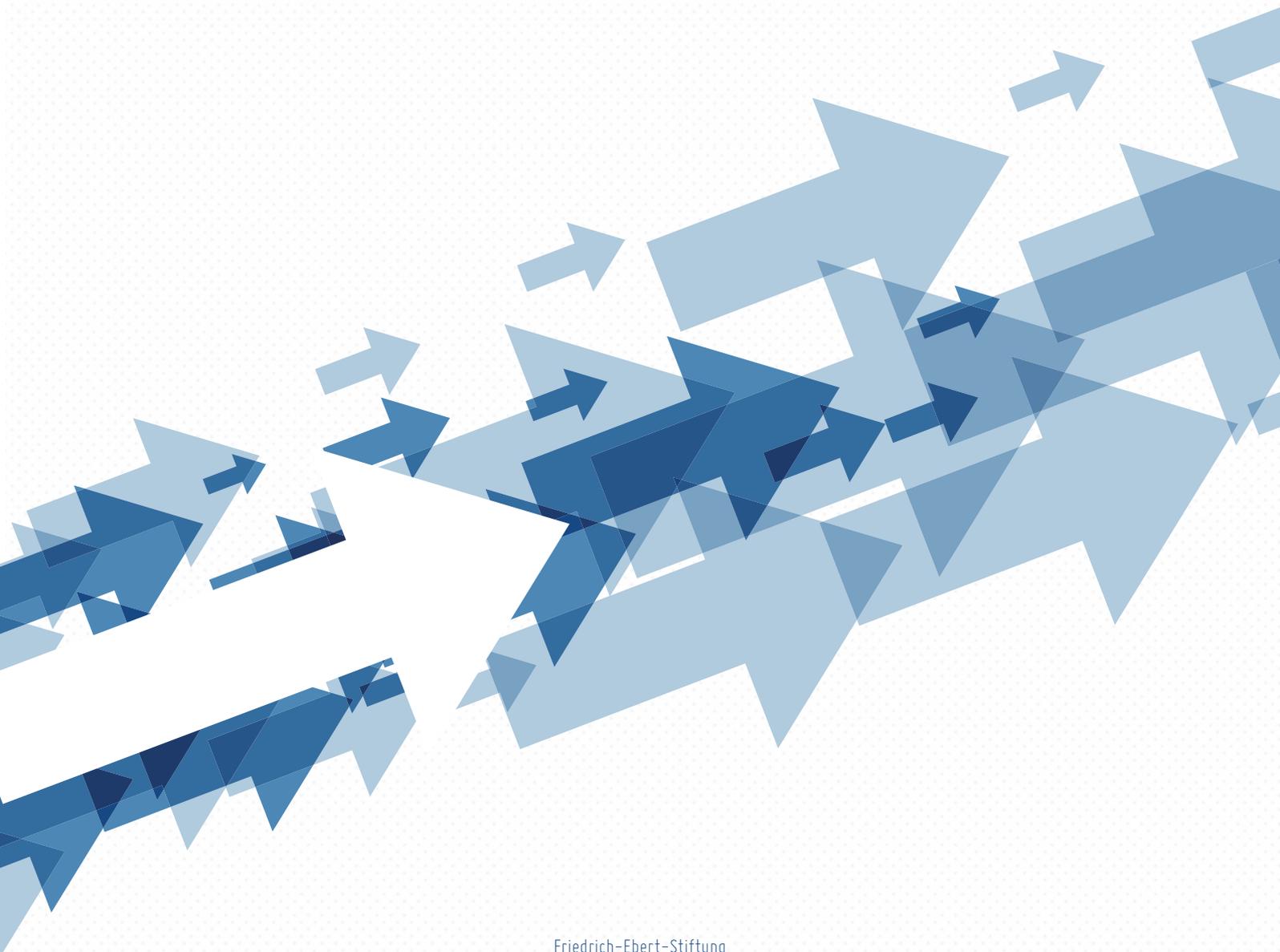


THE POWER RESOURCES APPROACH IN THE MENA REGION



THE POWER RESOURCES APPROACH in the MENA Region

Ghassan Slaiby

S O M M A I R E

INTRODUCTION	04
1) ASSOCIATIONAL POWER	05
2) STRUCTURAL POWER	08
3) INSTITUTIONAL POWER	10
4) SOCIETAL POWER	12
SUMMARY	15

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a basic introduction to the 'Power Resources Approach' for a MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) audience. In particular it targets trade unionists, representatives of global union federations (GUFs) and researchers. The rationale for this choice of target groups is that cooperation among the three will be necessary for any concrete, realistic and effective attempts to apply this approach in the MENA region.

The document from which the basics of the power resources approach are taken is The Power Resources Approach, written by Stefan Schmalz and Klaus Dorre and adopted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) project "Trade Unions in Transformation" as a theoretical starting point.¹ All quotations relating to the approach in the present text are taken from this document.

According to Schmalz and Dorre:

"A consensus has emerged in international trade union research that trade unions are not solely at the mercy of major societal trends, but rather always have the option of making strategic choice. A new branch of research has since established itself under the label labor revitalization studies."

"The power resources approach ... is founded on the basic premise that the workforce can successfully defend its interests by collective mobilization of power resources."

Power is defined here, following Max Weber, as "every opportunity within a social relationship to assert one's own will, even in the face of resistance."

The document, in summary, states that "to date, this approach has been based predominantly on the experiences of the Global North" and "in isolated cases the analysis instrument has also been applied to social processes in the Global South". However, almost all case studies of applications of the approach collected in the FES project Trade Unions in Transformation are from the Global South. These case studies are evidence that the approach is applicable outside the

Global North; they enrich it and add their own reflections on what makes unions strong.

Although the MENA region was part of the FES project, only one case study from the region has been developed: that of Tunisia. This is an indication of the fact that the issue of revitalizing unions in the MENA region has hardly surfaced. Researchers have not properly addressed this issue, and analysis of concrete trade union action is in general too rare. The unions themselves have not put this challenge on their agenda, despite the difficulties they face dealing either with globalization or with local factors. These difficulties arise especially in connection with membership, freedom of association, and effectiveness in defending their rights and asserting their demands.

Some unions in the region have relied on Global Union Federations (GUFs), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and Solidarity Support Organizations (SSOs) to develop themselves. However, this has on most occasions been at the instigation of the external organizations rather than the unions themselves, who tend to see development projects as extraneous activities, despite the needs assessment workshops that sometimes precede elaboration of the projects. Although the external organizations are quite aware of this, no serious initiatives have been taken to revise processes of needs assessment and external cooperation. Few external partners, apart from FES, have given much importance to the role of research and researchers in dealing with realities and attitudes in the MENA region.

This paper considers application of the Power Resources Approach in the MENA region in the context of the general problem of union revitalization in the region. This wider problem has to be addressed through cooperation among trade unions, GUFs and researchers, keeping in mind that 'revitalization' - in contrast to 'development' - has to be a more "deliberate, organized and conscious effort"² by the people concerned, requiring changes in energy and attitudes in addition to knowledge.

The Power Resources Approach was originally developed in the Global North, and probably took for granted conditions of democracy in the societies to which it was intended to apply. It is therefore theo-

¹ Schmalz, Stefan and Dörre, Klaus, *The power resources approach. Working Paper prepared for the FES Project "Trade Unions in Transformation"*, Berlin: FES, 2017. Online at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/14064.pdf>.

² Wallace, Anthony, *Revitalization movements. American Anthropologist* 58(2): 264-281, 1956.

retically important to question whether the approach can also work in the non-democratic societies that prevail in the MENA region. While this paper offers some answers, broader reflection is needed, based on scientific analysis of more cases whose details would be collected through an adequate methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Although the Power Resources Approach is the result of an academic and theoretical process, this paper adopts an educational method for its presentation. This method can be seen as similar to the “problem posing method” developed by Paolo Freire.³

The similarity between the problem posing method and the method of presentation used in this paper is that the latter:

- Will not present the Power Resources Approach as a prescription for action in the MENA region, but rather as an issue that needs to be discussed and reshaped through dialogue, taking into account the actual context in the region.
- Will “emphasize critical thinking for the purpose of liberation”. The word liberation, as used by Freire, is used here in the sense of liberation of thought, energy and activity within a process of revitalization.

In this paper, the method will be applied through the three following steps, which will be undertaken for each kind of power resource:

- 1- A short explanation of the kind of power resource;
- 2- A summary of the current situation in the MENA region regarding context relevant to the particular power resource under consideration;
- 3- Examples of trade union experiences with use of that particular power resource and questions these examples raise about the use of the Power Resources Approach in the MENA region, questions that would be of some interest to the three main target groups (trade unionists, GUFs and researchers).

THE POWER RESOURCES APPROACH

The Power Resources Approach considers the possibility for trade unions to use four different kind of power resources, separately or jointly: associational power, structural power, institutional power and social power.

1) ASSOCIATIONAL POWER

What is associational power?

According to Schmaltz and Doore:

“Associational power arises from workers unity to form collective political or trade union workers associations.”

Three levels are distinguished here: in the workplace where work groups or worker councils are important, the industry-wide level where trade unions are the major players and the societal level where workers’ political parties are involved. An additional level can also be mentioned: the supranational level at which global unions act to represent wage earners in different countries.

What are the components of associational power?

The ‘power of the members’ number’, the power of membership, is one indicator or determining factor of associational power: the larger the **membership** and the greater the workers’ unity, the higher the collective bargaining power. Women’s membership can be considered an additional indicator of associational power, especially when women are numerous in the sector.

Members’ real **participation** is a precondition of members’ numerical power: participation in events such as meetings, decision-making, election campaigns and strikes. Here again, women’s participation is an important qualitative indicator of member participation.

Participation occurs within an organizational structure that needs to make best use of “the division of

³ Freire, Paolo, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1970.

labor in the organization, the working process and the distribution of resources". Infrastructural resources, material and human, all have to serve the effective operation of the organization: income, offices, staff, experts, educators, etc.

Associational power also builds on internal cohesion expressed through strong solidarity among members. This internal cohesion develops through creation of a collective identity, formed by experiences, social networks and ideological common ground.

MENA REGION GENERAL CONTEXT RELEVANT TO ASSOCIATIONAL POWER

This section provides general information⁴ relevant to the different components of associational power.

- **Freedom of association:** only nine Arab countries ratified ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. However, most of these countries, in addition to the non-ratifying countries, do not fulfill the stipulations of the convention in relevant legislation. Most Arab countries adopt the model of the unique national center and single union per sector.

- **Union independence:** most of the national centers and unions are controlled by governments, who use various tools for domination: political affiliation of union leaders to the ruling party or parties, direct repression, socio-economic measures in the workplace, provision of specific social services and benefits to leaders, religious and cultural beliefs justifying domination, bylaws ensuring control of the national center over unions and of unions over sections, and so on. Nevertheless, some independent national centers are still active, most importantly in Tunisia, Morocco and Bahrain. As a reaction to the domination of unions by governments, independent unions have been created, mainly in Algeria, Egypt and Jordan.

- **Membership:** in the absence of specific research

and of well-established collective bargaining systems, unionization rates are usually manipulated by both governments and unions. Recent general research⁵ on trade unions provides some rates: Palestine 28.4 per cent, Egypt 16 per cent in official unions and eight per cent in independent unions. An older study⁶ gave these rates: Palestine 25 per cent, Jordan 34 per cent and Tunisia 53 per cent. Except in Tunisia, unionization is weak in the MENA region, taking into account that in some unions the high rate of membership is due to automatic affiliation of workers rather than actual choice. The weakness of unionization makes it difficult for unions to make effective use of pressure actions or collective bargaining.

- **Participation:** participation in unions in the MENA region is not in general scientifically measured. Our previous study,⁷ covering five Arab countries (Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt), revealed that public service workers considered union elections the most important form of participation and participation in pressure actions the least important, also neglecting other kinds of participation like attending meetings and being involved in decision making.

When we measured participation in the five countries, the findings were:

A. Strong participation in meetings in Tunisia, weak in the other countries.

B. Strong participation in elections in Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan, weak in Palestine and Egypt.

C. Strong participation in pressure actions in Lebanon, moderate in Tunisia and weak in the other countries.

- **Infrastructural resources:** resources such as union income, offices and staff are more visible in unions supported by governments. The use of experts, researchers and trainers is very rare in general, but more regular and common in North Africa than in the Middle East and Gulf sub-regions. Pro-government unions usually rely on government aid for their expenses and most of the unions in the region rely on GUFs, the ILO and SSOs for their educational activities.

- **Organizational structure:** Most unions in the region adopt centralized forms of organization, (concentration of power in the hands of the leadership

⁴ Information concerning the MENA context is either based on research or on personal observations of the author. Research will be cited when used.

⁵ Ghassan Slaiby, *The Arab trade union movement, Research horizons, American University of Beirut, 2017.*

⁶ Ghassan Slaiby, *Membership and participation in public services unions in the Arab countries, PSI publications, 2007.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

and weak devolution of power from national centers to member unions). The exception is Lebanon, whose national center has adopted a confederated model that gives it no real power over affiliated unions. Although some unions and national centers have created regional or enterprise sections and committees, decentralization in terms of responsibilities and autonomy is still very weak.

- **Internal cohesion:** although conflicts within unions are common, divisions are rare within pro-government unions, both because of legislative barriers to creation of alternative unions and because cohesion is imposed from without. Conflicts mostly arise over elections, financial resources and representation in external events, rarely from ideological differences. In Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain, confessional and religious factors have led to the creation of confessional trade union organizations and consequently to weak cohesion at sectorial and national levels.

EXPERIENCING ASSOCIATIONAL POWER IN THE MENA REGION

Although 'organizing' is not very common within MENA region unions, some experiences have been observed in relation to different components of associational power:⁸

The largest organizing action in the region was the process of creating independent unions in Egypt. Thousands of people were organized and recruited in a short period preceding and following the Egyptian revolution in 2011.

The UGTT (Tunisian National Center) adopted a limited step towards financial decentralization, allowing its affiliates to retain 15 per cent of fees collected, which were previously given in full to the UGTT.

Trade unions in Lebanon implemented a campaign, 'Side by side at work and outside' to preserve unity

and cohesion within the union in an atmosphere of confessional conflicts in the country.

The independent unions in Jordan adopted "their own internal bylaws, to comply with democratic proceeding, a decentralized management system and to limit the right to be elected president to only two mandates."⁹ It is noteworthy that unions affiliated to the national center have to apply a set of bylaws imposed by the center.

In 2011, the electricity union in Jordan developed its organizational structure by creating elected geographical and workplace committees. This was despite the decision of the national center to eliminate geographical divisions. The union structures that developed this way were used to increase membership.

In the past few years there have been many local and international initiatives aiming to increase women's membership and participation. A number of trade unions endorsed female participation quotas ranging from twenty to thirty per cent (Palestine, Tunisia, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt). It is important to mention the decision of the National Autonomous Union of Public Administration Staff in Algeria (SNAPAP) in 2003 to adopt equal representation of women and men. The General Secretary being a woman, female members announced their decision to withdraw from the union if equality was not adopted. The women's action is an example of their use of structural power (to be addressed in the next section of the paper) within the union as a 'disruptive' instrument.

A big Public Services International (PSI) project covering Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon aimed by the year 2000 to "increase membership and participation within the affiliates." Starting with research on factors influencing membership and participation, the affiliates developed a plan of action and implemented it using structures they had previously created and for which they had provided training (education, mobilization structures and women's committees). Consequent increases in membership and participation have been observed among both men and women.

Despite legal and extra-legal constraints on organiz-

⁸ The selection of the experiences does not necessarily reflect their degree of importance in the MENA region, but is rather done for educational purposes. The selection is also influenced by the experiences of the author, who used to represent PSI in the region and who often has more accurate information about events than some other sources. When available, examples will be given from the three sub regions; Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf.

⁹ Ahmad Awad, *Labor Movements and Unions and the Quest for Social Justice in the Arab World: the Case of Jordan*, AUB, 2017.

ing, the examples given reveal great capacities and strong initiatives. Research has to make more explicit the specific features of approaches undertaken in particular contexts and the roles played by collective mobilization, NGOs and GUFs, especially in relation to the emerging phenomenon of independent unions.

2) STRUCTURAL POWER

What is “structural power”?

According to Schmaltz and Doore, “structural power refers to the position of wage-earners in the economic system”. It “rests on the power to cause disruption and as such to interrupt or restrict the valorization of capital”. In the context of labor relations, structural power arises from the mutual dependency of workers and employers. Schmaltz and Doore identify two forms of structural power: “workplace bargaining power”, and “marketplace bargaining power”.

Workplace bargaining power depends on the position of workers in the production process. It is mobilized through refusal to continue working as employers demand, using methods such as strikes, sit-ins, sabotage and go-slows. By stopping work, workers can create major costs for employers and consequently force them to make concessions concerning wages and working conditions. Work stoppages at strategic positions in production processes, or in export branches, can have impacts beyond the workplace.

“Marketplace bargaining power is the product of a tight labor market and as such the possession of rare qualities and skills demanded by employees, low unemployment and the ability to fully withdraw from the labor market and live off other sources of income”. Marketplace bargaining power varies according to the status of employees: whether they are in stable employment, in vulnerable employment or unemployed. Government intervention, for example through immigration policies, may also impose limits on marketplace bargaining power.

GENERAL MENA REGION CONTEXT RELEVANT TO STRUCTURAL POWER

This section provides general information about factors that influence structural power, such as the structure of labor markets, size of enterprises, rate of unemployment and presence of migrant workers.

According to the Joint Arab Economic Report 2015 the service sector accounts for around 62 per cent of employment in the MENA region, industry 17.4 per cent and agriculture 20.6 per cent. While the service sector predominates in all countries (except Morocco), the contributions of the industrial and agricultural sectors vary from country to country. The ILO’s fourth report, 104th session (2015) includes some statistics concerning employment, broken down according to enterprise size. The MENA region, when compared with some other regions (Eastern Europe/Central Asia, East Asia/Pacific, Latin America/Caribbean, Africa and South Asia), has the highest relative contribution to employment (thirty per cent) of businesses with between five and nineteen employees, and the lowest percentage contributions of businesses in the classes 20-49, 50-99, and 100-249 employees. The ILO figures¹⁰ also show that by the year 2010, just before the start of the Arab Spring, unemployment in MENA was higher (at 9.6 to 9.9 per cent) than in other developing regions in Africa (eight per cent) and Asia (four per cent).

The ILO¹¹ estimates that the number of international workers in Arab states is about 32 million. “The Arab states region is one of the main destination region, globally, for migrant workers. The proportion to local workers is among the highest in the world. Many of these migrant workers are manual or domestic workers”. It is noteworthy that the data on these factors, taken individually or in interaction with each other, reveal serious constraints on leverage of structural power by workers and unions. In particular, the general predominance of the service sector and small size of enterprises have negative effects on workplace bargaining power, while high unemployment rates and large numbers of migrant workers negatively affect marketplace bargaining power.

¹⁰ Gilbert Achkar, *Le peuple veut, Sindbad, Actes sud, 2013.*

¹¹ www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm

EXPERIENCING STRUCTURAL POWER IN THE MENA REGION

Despite such constraints, there have been incidents of labor protests. In recent years, these have been monitored more regularly and more closely. In addition to the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services in Egypt (CTUWS), two labor watch associations have been created and remained active during the last ten years (2008-2018), one in Jordan and one in Lebanon. The following information highlights some aspects of “structural power” in these three countries.

Evolution of protests in Jordan¹²

- Social protests increased in number from 139 in 2010 to 890 in 2013 and subsequently decreased, reaching 288 in 2016.
- Strikes and sit-ins are the main forms of protest.
- In 2016 around sixty per cent of protests were in the public sector. In terms of economic sector, more than seventy per cent were in transportation, services, textiles or manufacturing.
- The majority of protests are carried out by workers who are not organized by unions, reaching 98 per cent in 2016.
- Unemployed people are also among the groups that have protested during the last six years. Numbers of such protests decreased from 2011 to 2016, perhaps reflecting declining influence and power in the face of the huge numbers of migrant workers entering the labor market.

Evolution of protests in Egypt¹³

- Labor protests have increased in parallel with intensified liberalization of economic policy since 1990, from only 37 in 1988-1989 to 237 in 1989. Since 2006 Egypt has experienced the largest and strongest wave of worker protests since World War II (rising in number from 266 in 2006 to 700 in 2009).

- These labor protests originated outside the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), even before creation of the first independent union in 2008.

- Most protests following the revolution in 2011 were carried out by independent unions or non-unionized workers.

2016 protests in Lebanon¹⁴

- 16 strikes, 49 sit-ins and eight demonstrations were reported in 2016.

- Most labor protests during the past ten years have been in the public sector (administration and education).

- These labor protests are carried out by worker ‘leagues’ (leagues of public sector teachers and of civil servants) because trade unions are not allowed in the public sector.

- In addition to the leagues, the union of private sector teachers was also implicated.

To complement the general information given for the above three countries, below we give details about two specific cases, one in Palestine and one in Egypt.

Palestine: teachers’ strike¹⁵

From mid-March 2016, teachers in Palestine conducted a series of protests ranging from strikes to demonstrations. The teachers’ demands focused on delayed delivery of rights due since four years previously and included in agreements with the government. The teachers’ action was declared against the wishes of the Teachers’ Trade Union Federation.

Different measures have been used to stop the teachers’ action: police interference with the strike, prevention of teachers from joining gatherings and demonstrations, imprisonment of teachers, the use of mosques to disseminate propaganda against strikes, and the assumption of ambiguous positions by the Palestinian trade union movement. The strike was stopped by a presidential decree.

Although it could be seen as an unsuccessful use of structural power because of the failure of the strike,

¹² Labor protests in Jordan 2016, www.phenixcenter.net/en/paper/175, 2017.

¹³ Nadine Abdallah, *The trade union movement in Egypt in light of the 2011 uprising*, AUB Policy Institute, 2017.

¹⁴ *Lebanese Labor Watch*, 2016, in collaboration with Diakonia.

¹⁵ إيهن عبد المجيد، رانيا أبو غبوش، الحركة العمالية والنقابية والبحث عن العدالة الاجتماعية - فلسطين المحتلة، الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت، 2017.

we think this example is an important demonstration of the nature of structural power in a context marked by weak associational power on the part of trade unions and by social and political hostility (weak social power).

EGYPT: STRIKES LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST INDEPENDENT UNION

In 2008, for eleven consecutive days employees of the real estate tax authority held strikes and sit-ins to assert their demands. The workers went on strike without the agreement of their trade union, which is affiliated to the pro-government national federation (ETUF). The strike was successful and encouraged the workers to transform their structural power into associational power: they decided to form a union, the first independent union in the history of Egypt. The union has benefited from social power (the support of the NGO CTUWS) and from global associational power (the support of the Public Services Institute (PSI), a global union that affiliated the union despite refusal of its affiliation by the ETUF). A visible indication of the importance of this international associational power is that the newly-formed RETA (Real Estate Tax Authority) union indicated its membership of PSI beneath its name, both outside and inside its offices, and on membership cards. It is worth noting that the union was technically illegal, and acting in defiance of a repressive regime.

The examples given from five Arab countries indicate how unions have mobilized a great quantity of structural power. Further research should seek to identify particular disruptions undertaken in order to threaten capital in specific production processes. More information and detail would enrich knowledge of disruption dynamics, in relation to both tactics and strategies.

3) INSTITUTIONAL POWER

What is institutional power?

Schmaltz and Doore tell us that:

“Institutional power is usually the result of struggles and negotiation processes based on structural power and associational power. Such institutions, which as a secondary form of power, constitute a coagulated form of the two other primary forms of power”.

“New institutions usually arise at the end of combative cycles of the workers movement, historical- political breaks with the past (de-colonialization) or were implemented when capital was dependent on the workers movement’s willingness to cooperate”.

“Institutional power is of a twofold nature: it may grant workers far reaching rights, at the same time it restricts their power to act”.

Institutional power is usually mobilized within tripartite social dialogue institutes like the economic and social council or through collective bargaining processes, either at the company level or sectorial level.

“The unique feature of institutional power is its steadfastness over time. It is rooted in the fact that institutions lay down basic social compromises transcending economic cycles and short term political changes. Trade unions can even still use institutional power resources if their associational power and structural power is at an ebb”.

Institutional power can be weakened by three factors: underlying economic conditions (for example, relocations have undermined the workplace bargaining power of workers), behavior of holders of capital (trade unions have to be accepted by employers as representatives of employees’ interests), and attacks on institutional power (such as the amendment of labor laws to restrict the right to strike or to increase the percentage of workers required to be members for trade unions to engage in collective bargaining).

GENERAL MENA REGION CONTEXT RELEVANT TO INSTITUTIONAL POWER

This section includes information about ILO conventions relating to collective bargaining and social dialogue, along with a general evaluation of social dialogue in the MENA region.

The ratification by Arab countries of ILO conventions relating to social dialogue and collective bargaining can help us understand the legal situation regarding restrictions on the use of institutional power. The current situation concerning these ratifications is as follows:

- Nine out of 20 countries have ratified Convention 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize
- Fourteen of 20 countries have ratified Convention 98 on the right to organize and collective bargaining
- Eight of 20 countries have ratified Convention 135 on workers' representatives
- Eight of 20 countries have ratified convention 144 on tripartite consultation
- No country has ratified Convention 151 on labor relations (public services)
- One country has ratified Convention 154 on collective bargaining

The low rate of ratification for most conventions did not prevent many Arab countries from institutionalizing social dialogue through collective bargaining or creation of tripartite institutions such as social and economic councils. Decolonization has played a role in creating the need for institutionalization in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Conditions in the post war period have played the same role in Lebanon and other factors, such as ILO initiatives, have done so in Jordan.

An ILO document on social dialogue in the Arab countries¹⁶ provided a negative evaluation of its functioning and impact. Although the document does not justify its conclusion by providing clear indicators, the outcome of the evaluation is consistent with opinions shared by many observers and experts.

In its guide to social dialogue,¹⁷ the ILO identifies certain preconditions for successful social dialogue: a democratic regime, freedom of association, independent and representative social partners, and institutional support. All of these preconditions can be evaluated as rather weak in the MENA region, with some variation from country to country. This choice of preconditions supposes close links among institutional power, associational power and social power

(democracy). Unfortunately, it underestimates the dynamic role of structural power in promoting social dialogue.

The paradox in the MENA region is that in many countries there is a disconnect between institutional power and structural power: workers relying on structural power resources are not represented in social dialogue institutions, and those that can benefit from institutional power rarely make use of structural power because of their pro-government attitudes or their obedience to government will. Another paradox here is that these workers are able to benefit from institutional power because of their cooperation with the government, which usually uses institutional power in order to achieve more cooptation of trade unions. The nepotism and crony capitalism that characterizes authoritarian regimes in the MENA region creates particular relationships between governments and employers that trivialize both collective bargaining and tripartite social dialogue.

EXPERIENCING INSTITUTIONAL POWER IN THE MENA REGION

This section considers examples from Tunisia, Lebanon and Bahrain. We have selected these three examples for a particular reason: they show how institutional power can compensate for the weakness or absence of other power resources in a specific context.

TUNISIA:

During the dictatorial regime of Ben Ali, when possibilities for using structural power and social power were limited, there was sustained institutionalized social dialogue at both sectoral and national levels. Within this framework, the trade union movement, represented by the UGTT, was able to negotiate regularly and successfully on salaries and work conditions. Two factors are likely to have helped this process. First, the strong associational power of the UGTT (in the public sector but not in the private sector) in terms of membership, cohesion, infrastructural resources and organizational structure (its centralized structure, in this case close coordination between union levels: workplace, sectors and national). Second, the polit-

¹⁶ الازمة وإدارة سوق العمل: الحوار الاجتماعي كاستجابة، ورقة عمل، المنتدى العربي للتشغيل، 2009.

¹⁷ *National Tripartite Social Dialogue, An ILO Guide for Improved Governance, 2013.*

ical will to involve the UGTT in the socio-economic policy of the regime and consequently to neutralize its historical political opposition.

LEBANON:

The banking sector is the strongest in Lebanon in terms of growth, profit and political influence. Other economic sectors are facing huge difficulties, especially the industrial and agricultural sectors.

In relation to application of the law on collective bargaining, the banking sector is known for its collective agreement between owners and the federation of unions of bank employees. Although the federation is considered more representative and independent than other union federations in the country (which have low levels of representation and are dominated by confessional political parties), its associational and structural powers are limited by a lack or total absence of members in the biggest and most influential banks. Nevertheless, its weak associational and structural power is compensated by institutional power, reinforced by the political and economic need for stability in the banking sector. However, it is noteworthy that worker benefits within the collective agreement have declined in recent years, the union federation having shown weakness in its ability to mobilize employees during rare protests, mainly sit-ins.

BAHRAIN:

Labor relations in Bahrain are organized through a tripartite structure that monitors the application of labor policies and regulations. Bahraini workers constitute 84.5 per cent of the public sector workforce, while non-Bahraini workers make up 81.5 per cent of the workforce in the private sector. Across the two sectors combined the migrant workforce accounts for 77 per cent of total employment in the country.¹⁸ In the 1990s, rising unemployment pushed the government to implement regulations that prioritized the employment of nationals. Accordingly, 'job nationalization policies' were adopted and reviewed over time. These policies responded to the demands of the Bahraini Workers' Federation (GFBTU).

The preference for foreign over national labor is mostly due to the lack of skilled labor among nationals, along with wage issues. In this context the structural power and in particular marketplace power of nation-

als are weakened. Nevertheless, the GFBTU managed to satisfy their demands concerning prioritization of national labor. Several factors could have contributed to this outcome: well-established social dialogue (institutional power), the associational power of the GFBTU as a body that is both representative and independent, and probable political will to satisfy the population's demands on the part of a confessional regime lacking popular legitimacy.

It is noteworthy that although the GFBTU actively works to organize migrant workers, the overwhelming majority of its members are Bahraini citizens. In parallel with negotiations with the government, the GFBTU attempted to communicate with the Migrant Workers Protection Society, but met with failure. The relationship between the GFBTU and migrant workers needs to be radically altered.

Understanding the successful use of institutional power by trade unions requires more detail about legal procedures concerning collective bargaining and social dialogue in local contexts. It also requires information about the capacity of unions to use structural power as a latent factor backing the social dialogue process.

4) SOCIETAL POWER

What is societal power?

Societal power means "the latitudes for action arising from viable cooperation context with other social groups and organizations and society's support for trade union demands". There are two sources of societal power: power through cooperation and discursive power. "These two power resources are mutually reinforcing."

"Power through cooperation means having networks to other social actors at one's disposal and being able to activate these forms of mobilizations and campaigns. Essentially they involve pursuing common goals and entering into mutual commitment."

"Such coalitions can only work if there are bridge builders – people who are equally rooted in the trade union and non-trade union context and if alliances go beyond selective, occasional cooperation."

¹⁸ Ahmed Al Haddad, Maarten Danckaert, *Labor movements and unions and the quest for social justice in the Arab world, case study Bahrain*, AUB 2017.

Political parties and civil society associations are the social actors with whom trade unions usually cooperate and build networks. Their common goals can be socio-economic, such as privatization and agreements concerning free trade and investment, or political, such as trade union and human rights. According to the specific history of each country, the bridge builders can originally come from the trade unions or from other social actors.

Discursive power is the capacity for trade unions “to successfully intervene in public debates on historically established underlying hegemonic structures of the public sphere.”

“The discursive power of trade unions is only effective, however, if it is in line with prevailing views of morality.”

“Furthermore, trade unions also need to offer credible interpretation patterns or frames and solutions to problems and present them to the public”.

The discursive power of unions depends on both external and internal factors. The extent to which the political system is democratic and freedom of opinion and speech are granted will determine the unions’ possibilities for action, along with internal capacities, for example for use of the mass media. In all situations, the credibility of the trade union movement will increase or reduce its impact on public opinion.

“Changes in the underlying conditions also change the social power of the trade unions”.

Societal power seems to be deeply affected by political changes.

MENA REGION GENERAL CONTEXT RELEVANT TO SOCIETAL POWER

Here we provide general information on the relationships between trade unions and NGOs on the one hand, and trade unions and political parties on the other.

Most of the workshops discussing the relationships between trade unions and civil society associations in the region raised the issue of lack of trust between

the two. Unions tend to consider civil society associations as unrepresentative and unrealistic, ‘having their heads in the clouds’, and civil society associations to consider unions as neither independent nor representative. Unfortunately, a serious study on their interrelationships in the MENA region is still lacking.

In some countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), the trade union movement was part of the liberation movement against colonization, a situation that created relationships with the leading liberation political parties. Following decolonization this relationship has in some cases been consolidated (Algeria), in others deteriorated (Morocco, Tunisia). In other countries still in a phase of liberation, like Palestine, the different political parties have created their own trade unions, united within the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU).

A specific form of relationship is also evident in Lebanon and Kuwait. In Lebanon, following the war, confessional conflicts prevailed over class conflicts. For political reasons, confessional political parties created their own confessional unions and federations, affiliated to the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL). In Kuwait, the tribal structure of society is behind the existence of different factions and conflicts among these within the national federation.

EXPERIENCING SOCIETAL POWER IN THE MENA REGION

The examples below show rising degrees of societal power from country to country. It is noteworthy that in none of the examples below are unions using their public credibility or legitimacy or mobilizing support from customers as tools for expanding social power, mainly because these two approaches are not yet well developed in the MENA region.

MOROCCO:

In Morocco, people opposing the regime have been bridge builders contributing to the creation of leftist political parties, trade unions and the Forum Social Alternatif, who together animated the “Movement of 20 February” in 2011 as a wave of the Arab Spring.

The close historical relationship between trade unions and political parties has created certain mistrust

among different national centers. Nevertheless, recent years witnessed cooperation and joint strikes for common demands. Trade union social power in Morocco depends primarily on cooperation within the union itself, which can be hindered by political factors.

ALGERIA:

In Algeria following the uprising in 1988 and the democratic constitutional amendment, civil associations and independent unions have been created, here again with initiatives from bridge builders belonging to both sides. In 2011 this alliance created the 'National Coordination for Change and Democracy'.

In recent years, the SNAPAP (Syndicat National Autonome du Personnel des Administrations Publiques, or National Independent Trade Union for Civil Servants) has developed a network through direct mobilization of or support for informal interest groups like the unemployed, young people looking for their first job, migrant workers, and collectives working on issues like housing. Some studies¹⁹ have seen in these initiatives an attempt from the SNAPAP to expand its legitimacy in the face of repression from the government. While asked about their 'social' strategy the leader of SNAPAP declared that in his view it is the best way to strengthen democracy in the country.²⁰

EGYPT:

The relationships between trade unions and both political parties and NGOs have been problematic.

On April 6 2008, cyber activists took the workers' call for a strike and sit-in at the Misr Company for Spinning and Weaving, located in Mahalla, and transformed it into a call for a national strike. "Followed by several political opposition parties and movements, they turned the purely economic demands into a critique of the broader social and political in the country."²¹ Before that date the regime had rarely resorted to violence to disperse protest actions, but on April 6th it used its security apparatus to force the labor leaders to demobilize the workers and cancel their call for strike action. Leaders who did not agree were arrested. As a result,

distrust between the labor movement vis-à-vis political forces has existed ever since.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the relationship between the new trade union movement (independent unions) and political parties has included some cooperation, both during and since 2011. Nonetheless, the EDLC (Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress), formed from independent unions, recently refused to join a coalition to defend trade union freedom of association due to the involvement of political parties. It is also noteworthy that in 2014 a 'workers bloc' was formed to mobilize for parliamentary elections and this bloc explicitly expressed its support for an electoral list (Egypt Awakening).

The relationship between NGOs and independent trade unions was also problematic. The CTUWS has helped the creation of independent trade unions and supported them in several campaigns. But this close relationship has always created sensitivities concerning the independence of the trade unions vis-à-vis the CTUWS.

TUNISIA:

The use of societal power by the UGTT is already well known worldwide, both due to it being among the organizations that led the revolution, and because it was among the four Tunisian organizations that contributed most, and together, to consolidation of the transition phase towards democracy, winning the Nobel prize for that national mission. This historical role has been well analyzed by a study within the FES Unions in Transformation project.²² The study described and analyzed the different uses of the four power resources. Here we summarize, according to the study and to our own observations, the main factors that have contributed to the good use of societal power:

- The UGTT managed to integrate within its membership, during the dictatorial regime of Ben Ali, all political tendencies, especially from the opposition (leftists and nationalists).
- The geographical federations within the UGTT have retained a degree of autonomy despite its strong

¹⁹ Hussein Zoubairi, *Trade union movement in Algeria, AUB, 2017.*

²⁰ Interview with Rachid Malawi in 2017.

²¹ Nadine Abdallah, *op cit.*

²² Sami Adouani and Said Ben Sednina, *Pouvoir syndical et transition démocratique en Tunisie: l'UGTT, une histoire et une expérience inédite, 2017, FES publications.*

centralization. It is noteworthy that the UGTT originated in the unification of previously existing geographical federations. The relative autonomy of these geographical federations allowed them to have direct relationships with local communities involved in the revolution. The good infrastructural resources of the federations made it possible to host and to direct the uprising from their offices.

- Under the regime of Ben Ali the UGTT, directly and through bridge builders among trade unionists, maintained good cooperation with the league of human rights and the women's movement. In addition, its relationship with the league of lawyers was very fruitful during the revolution, when it was evident in the form of mutual support. Following the revolution the UGTT, together with the aforementioned organizations and various others, created the Forum Tunisien des Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FTDES).
- The historical relationship with employers (UTICA, Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat) during the liberation period, as well as cooperation and common experiences at the institutional power level in the social dialogue process during the Ben Ali era, have prepared the ground for good collaboration among the 'quartet' grouping, comprising UGTT, UTICA, and the leagues of lawyers and human rights.
- Finally, great support from the international trade union movement, within which the UGTT has historically built strong relations, has added to the associational power of the organization, allowing it to build all these networks.

These national examples of building societal power reveal the predominant role of the ideals of freedom and democracy as common ground on which to build strong networks. Most of the time it has been to defend themselves from repression that unions have sought societal power. Only in very few cases have unions built societal power in order to achieve their labor demands.

All the examples given emphasize unions' relationships with NGOs and political parties. A broader inquiry would provide examples where unions used their public credibility or legitimacy, or at least detect possibilities of such use.

SUMMARY

This paper aimed to introduce the potential of the Power Resources Approach within the MENA context. It showed significant constraints as well as great possibilities.

The paper will achieve its goal if it has a positive impact on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of trade unionists at three levels: motivating them towards better understanding of their power resources, changing their attitudes to the possibility of improving their situation, and giving them enthusiasm and energy for future actions.

The Power Resources Approach identifies four power resources that can be collectively mobilized by trade unions: associational power, structural power, institutional power and social power. This paper gives examples of the successful use of each of the four power resources in the MENA region. It also highlights the general context in which these experiences are taking place. The FES Trade Unions in Transformation project also provides lessons from different parts of the world, lessons that can be useful for trade unionists in the MENA region.

Trade unions, in cooperation with global union federations (GUFs) and SSOs, and with the assistance of researchers if needed, can further develop their understanding of the best use of the Power Resources Approach. They can enrich it with their own experience, adding more information and better awareness of its potential and limitations.

The Power Resources Approach is a tested tool for revitalization of trade unions, able to give them more influence over their situation. Globalization, along with the particularly difficult context of the MENA region, demands a strategic trade union approach to deal with workers' situations and demands. The Power Resources Approach can be used in strategic fashion through astute combination of the four power resources, taken individually or in interaction, within the particular contexts of specific countries and sectors.

FES is committed to assisting MENA trade unions in learning how to benefit from this approach through its Trade Unions in Transformation project. The political will of the MENA trade unions to develop their capacities is a precondition for this project's success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ghassan Slaiby

Researcher, expert and trainer on Labor and trade union issues
Has represented PSI* for more than 20 years in the Arab countries
Works actually as an independent expert with GUFs, EU and SSO's

*PSI = Public Services International

IMPRESSUM

Published by **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**
Regional Trade Union Program

Project « the power resources approach in the mena region »
Graphic design : Mehdi Jelliti / Magma Studio

June 2018
Tunis, Tunisie
www.fes-mena.org

Copyright all rights reserved.
This document is not for sale.



Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung