

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

HIJACKING LEBANON'S WORKFORCE:  
LABOR ISSUES, THE NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT  
AGENDA AND SOCIAL CHANGE

by  
NOEL ROSE AYMAN AWAD

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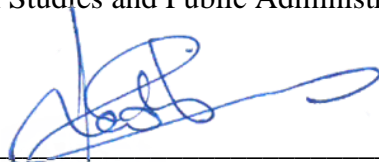


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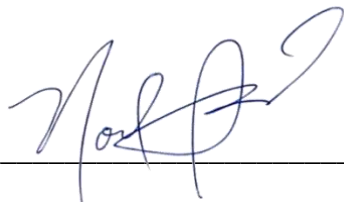
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While my identity has been in a constant feud between East and West, Beirut has been a place of refuge for my ever-wandering spirit and mind. It is with great respect that I dedicate this project to the people of Lebanon, who continue to inspire me with their attachment to home and country and the rich heritage they have preserved in the most inventive of ways. It is my hope that this research may contribute to a greater understanding of the complex challenges and help in charting a path towards the nation they have been eagerly building and sustaining over the past century.

Thank you to everyone who has walked this path with me.

# ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Noel Rose Ayman Awad

for

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and International Affairs

Title: Hijacking Lebanon's Workforce: Labor Issues, the Neoliberal Development  
Agenda and Social Change

This study examines the labor market crisis in Lebanon, rooted in historical policymaking failures and exacerbated by the recent economic collapse. It explores the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly their exploitation of skilled labor, in perpetuating the crisis by employing a significant proportion of the youth workforce in short-term crisis response instead of the long-term development of a productive economy. The research traces the origins of the weak labor market back to the silk trade in Mount Lebanon, the post-war reconstruction era, and the 2019 economic collapse. The investigation highlights the detrimental impact of neoliberal policies on the job market, leading to a severe brain drain phenomenon due to an oversupply of graduates and insufficient job opportunities.

Utilizing a case study approach, the project scrutinizes the services offered by Daleel Madani, a civil directory platform, questioning its claims of independence from donor funding and examining its contribution to the proliferation of the civil society space. The study aims to understand how Daleel Madani has effectively replaced the National Employment Agency (NEA) while simultaneously undermining its necessity. The analysis seeks to reveal the factors that have led to a non-productive economy and labor market in Lebanon and assess the potential benefits of reviving the NEA. By doing so, the research aims to offer insights into alternative solutions for addressing the labor market crisis and fostering a more sustainable and productive economic landscape.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CEACR: Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations

CDR: Council for Development and Reconstruction

CSO: Civil society organization

ILC: International Labour Conference

ILO: International Labour Organization

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

NEA: National Employment Agency

NEO: National Employment Office

NGO: Non-governmental organization

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCING THE PROJECT: WHY YOUTH LABOR?

*Understandings built upon wage labour cannot, we are told, account for the reality lived by the most numerous and wretched of the world's population: those without wages, those indeed without even the hope of wages. Bare life, wasted life, disposable life, precarious life, superfluous life: these are among the terms used to describe the inhabitants of a planet of slums. It is not the child in the sweatshop that is our most characteristic figure, but the child in the streets, alternately predator and prey.*

- Michael Denning, *Wageless Life* (2010)

The current economic collapse compounded with historical policymaking failures has resulted in a labor market crisis in Lebanon. The research element of the project will examine the ongoing labor supply issue with a particular focus on how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have access to and exploit a significant portion of the skilled workforce, especially youth, with the help of the networks like Daleel Madani. This highlights the dilemma that while the job seeking individuals might find employment in the sector, it is only due to the ongoing crisis. Thus, stimulating a cyclical pattern where the skilled workforce is perpetually employed in crisis response rather than contributing to the long-term development of the nation and the creation of a sustainable labor market. While the economic collapse has exacerbated the issue, the root causes of the labor market's weakness can be traced back to a series of compounded historical failures in policymaking and job creation beginning with the cultivation of the silk trade in Mount Lebanon, peaking during the post-war Hariri reconstruction era and ending with the eventual economic collapse of 2019.

Using a critique of neoliberal economics, the interconnected causes and effects of Lebanon's further weakened labor market will be researched and analyzed beginning

with the economic collapse in 2019. Since the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and especially after 2019, higher education institutes have produced a much larger number of graduates than the labor market has been capable of absorbing contributing to a major ‘brain drain’ phenomenon (Abou Jaoude 2015) (International Labour Organization 2018) (Dibeh, Fakhri, and Marrouch 2017). This project seeks to address the underlying structural problems and bad policymaking in the context of job creation and designing and reinforcing a stable job market. Through conducting the historical labor analysis and examining the failures of current policy solutions, we may find some other solutions that have not been thoroughly explored or enacted. A genealogical tracing of the history of the neoliberal labor scheme in Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and the Levant region more generally will be essential to fully analyzing the current trend of policymaking failures in the Lebanese government and ministries charged with the welfare of the economy and the job market. In conducting research and analyzing the existing literature both today and historically, the hope is to tease out these often-overlooked aspects of the failure of the Lebanese state to reinforce the labor market and keep the skilled workforce in Lebanon.

The case study aspect of the project will do a deep dive into the various services offered by Daleel Madani, especially questioning its statement that it operates free the restrictions and dependence on donor funding since it is in large part “self-funded” by its sister organization Lebanon Support. Moreover, the relationship between Daleel Madani and the proliferation of the civil society space and the associated development sector will be put into question. Through a close examination of Daleel Madani’s civil directory platform, the hope is to gain better insight into the functionality of the directory and how it has replaced the services of the de facto suspended National

Employment Agency (NEA) and at the same time undercuts the need for its existence. The investigation into the NEA will attempt to understand if it ever was in fact operating as intended – maintaining national offices as a resource for seeking employment opportunities in the country. Ultimately, the aim of the applied aspect of the project is to examine how the NGO/development sector in Lebanon has contributed to the proliferation of a non-productive economy and labor market through the case study of an NGO like Daleel Madani effectively replacing the National Employment Agency. These factors coupled with the skilled workforce searching for any opportunity to emigrate has deepened the labor market imbalance.

If my main theories prove relevant, in the post-project context, the next step should explore the feasibility of reviving the national employment agency – a network of local jobs, employers, and existing and emerging industries and their requisite skillsets to link jobless youth with employers, opportunities, and industries. Secondary goals of the agency should seek to provide youth with job and career counseling, better prepare youth for social change and precarity, and encourage accountability by providing a means to monitor cases of corruption in the local job market. To better engage with the failures of the state and its institutions, the current Lebanese workforce should build awareness about the NEA and its key role in developing the productive sectors of the economy. The reestablishment of the NEA should be an integral part of the demands of the people.

(“Unemployment” can be understood as a form of social exclusion, whereby the unemployed are rendered powerless within such neoliberal/capitalist societies.

Therefore, I will use terms such as wageless or jobless to highlight the state of negation and exclusion from the global economic project.)

## **1.1. Research Methods**

This thesis project will employ a two-pronged research methods approach – one specifically suited for the historical analysis and the other more situated for conducting research with practical implications on the current state of civil society in Lebanon. This project will make use of several interlinked research methods well-suited to each juncture of analysis. To make sense of the nature of globalized fields of research indeed this first requires an understanding of the strengths of traditional models and departures where needed. While examining deeply problematic policy processes under a microscope may have benefits at various scales, zooming out and up is necessary in the context of post/neocolonial Lebanon. Using the models of “studying up”, as proposed by Nader in *Up the Anthropologist*, allows the researcher to study the extent to which the industrialized world continues to sink its teeth into the social and economic policy processes of former colonies such as Lebanon.

Regarding the historical analysis, a genealogical framework is the most logical choice bringing the historical to the forefront in researching the roots of the Lebanese “laborscape”. The various genealogical and archaeological methods as proposed by the stalwart Michel Foucault prove essential if we establish as a baseline that social crises do not exist in a void. That said, Foucault’s methods will be used throughout this project to structure and frame the research. By analyzing the historical and political contexts which have given rise to bad policymaking and dysfunctional institutions, Lebanon’s youth joblessness crisis can be made more accessible.

The case study will utilize a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data analysis using visual methods whenever possible to convey any data findings better explored

visually. To understand the rich history and usage of visual data, the work of Marcus Banks in *Using visual data in qualitative research* will be consulted. Banks errs on the side of caution when it comes to using visual representations such as tables, diagrams, graphs, bar charts, etc. He states, “These are all forms of representation that generally have a reductive quality. Subtleties and fine texture are eliminated or smoothed out, ‘data’ are aggregated. This is often particularly useful, allowing the researcher to spot patterns and trends of sociological significance” (Banks 2007). Although my research will make use of pre-existing graphs and charts produced by institutions such as the OECD or the World Bank, the historical and analytical scope of my work will fill in the “texture” that may have been smoothed out by such visual data representations. We cannot ignore the strength of recognizing patterns inherent to quantitative data, however we can make sure to explore the aspects not touched upon by such graphs or charts. Aggregated visual data do not paint the full picture, they are descriptive but not explanatory (Banks 2007). Therefore, wherever graphs or charts are used, they will be complementary to the greater analytical research conducted. Furthermore, to fully dissect the work of Daleel Madani, it will be crucial to apply a content analysis method of “visual culture” as described by Banks (a la Marx or even Foucault). An important aspect of Foucault’s work is that of the “raw materials” essential to any study or organization of ideas and systems of thought. He used this approach in the field of the “human” sciences - that of analyzing relations of power and knowledge based on their discursive raw materials. By raw materials, Foucault meant any material object, otherwise often overlooked, used as tools of the trade by producers of knowledge. This translated in practice to analyzing the tools of instruction and discourse, such as academic texts and the language they employ or even the persons involved in the

academic systems. As such, the material content produced by Daleel Madani, such as the NGO guidebook or even the published series “A Practical Guide for Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon” will be analyzed in the case study section.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Historical Perspectives of Waged Labor in the Levant



Figure 1. Worker harvesting sea salt from the marshes in Anfeh, Lebanon in 1958. From Live Love Beirut photo archive, 2020.

The growing body of literature on the compounding effects of neoliberal economics and globalization often reveals a correlation with crisis. Most notably within the formation of nation-states that emerged in the aftermath of independence from the colonial powers and today face unprecedented upheaval with the specter of crisis perpetually looming. In the Levant region, the functioning of the states is at a critical



junction, characterized by both internal and external instability and the continued absence of legitimate and effective authority. Amid this cataclysm, to make sense of the historical relationship between power, civil society and labor in the region, it helps first and foremost to turn to Foucault. Foucault's genealogical and archaeological approaches provide a rich methodology to help uncover the complex web of power relations, institutions, and discourses that have shaped these societies over time. Furthermore, within his lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*, the analysis of biopolitics and governmentality sheds light on the mechanisms through which power operates at various scales of society, from the individual to the state. This project will make use of Foucault's methods to study the historical landscape and shifts of labor and labor policymaking in Lebanon and the Levant more generally. It is crucial to understand the effect of neoliberal economics in shaping the labor market and later the role of NGOs in displacing the state from its duties and its legitimacy. Foucault's theories can provide a framework for examining the consequences of neoliberal policies on the country's labor market and the emergence of NGOs as key players in employing the skilled workforce. Ultimately, incorporating Foucault and his many theories will be instrumental in building a strong theoretical foundation for this project, enabling research findings and analysis as a critical engagement with the interplay between bad policymaking, NGOs, and the crisis of labor in Lebanon.

## **2.2. Capitalism in Crisis**

As an entry-point into the Marxist critique of capitalism, the many refined works of David Harvey, such as *The Condition of Postmodernity*, *The Limits to Capital*, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and *The New Imperialism*, will be essential to the

theoretical underpinnings of such a critique on waged labor and the corresponding case study. His perspective and analysis can provide invaluable insight into the relationship between power, capital accumulation, and the shaping of labor markets, as well as the structural imbalances that contribute to the crisis-driven nature of postcolonial contemporary neoliberal societies like Lebanon. One of Harvey's observations in *The Condition of Postmodernity* highlights the significance of examining not only the external conditions but also the internalized dialectics of thought and knowledge production that drive changes in society (Harvey, 1989). It falls to the critical scholars of the Levant region to engage in a reimagining of the existing structures and their underlying principles. It is precisely for that reason that sources revolved around the failures of neoliberal policies in Lebanon and the Middle East more generally written by local minds are appropriate here and add to the formula. As Marx (1967) puts it, "we erect our structure in imagination before we erect it in reality." In the context of the Lebanese labor market crisis, it is helpful to explore how historical policymaking failures, the role of NGOs, and neoliberal policies have contributed to shaping the prevailing mindset and knowledge production that led to the current crisis. By delving into these factors, this project aims to understand the deeper forces that have driven the labor market imbalance in Lebanon and inform potential solutions that address the root causes rather than just the symptoms of the crisis. In the same vein, the simultaneously inhibiting and overheating effects of globalization and capitalism can be accessed through the rich literature of scholars such as Appadurai, Burawoy, Shore and Wright, and Harvey and Tsing.

### **2.3. Governance and Policymaking in Lebanon**

To critically engage with the region's governance issues, deepening inequality and the "state of poor people's politics", the work of Heydemann, Baumann, Khattab etc. will be consulted. Within the same framework, this project will also consult Deeb and Winegar's *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* to delve into the continuation of the orientalist project as described foremost by Edward Said. The work of Sukarieh and Tannock will be used for a more intricate look at youth in the global economy. To understand the imperialistic implications associated with the neoliberal induced boom in civil society organizations, mainly NGOs, the many and varied works of both local and international critical scholars such as David Harvey, Efe Can Gürcan, Islah Jad, Paul Kingston, Sheila Carapico, Jamelia Harris, Lea Bou Khater and the like, will be carefully considered. The research and data of various local and regional policy institutes such as LCPS, CLS, ETF, MEI will be evaluated and utilized to form a greater understanding of the current situation. For example, the research and findings of the youth survey carried out by LCPS Research Fellow Fadi Nicholas Nassar will prove invaluable.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF LABOR IN THE LEVANT AND LEBANON

*With the strength of our arms we lifted the columns of the temple, and upon our backs we carried the mortar to build the great walls and the impregnable pyramids for the sake of glory. Until when shall we continue building such magnificent palaces and living in wretched huts? Until when shall we continue filling the bins of the rich with provisions, while sustaining weak life on dry morsels? Until when shall we continue weaving silk and wool for our lords and masters while we wear naught except tattered swaddles?*

*Through their wickedness we were divided amongst ourselves; and the better to keep their thrones and be at ease, they armed the Druze to fight the Arab, and stirred up the Shiite to attack the Sunnite, and encouraged the Kurdish to butcher the Bedouin, and cheered the Mohammedan to dispute with the Christian. Until when shall a brother continue killing his own brother upon his mother's bosom?*

– Kahlil Gibran, *Spirits Rebellious* (1947)

#### **3.1 Mt. Lebanon, the silk trade & the banking moguls (1861-1915)**

There are several distinct historical markers we can point to which led to the development of a globalized labor market in Lebanon. The history of waged labor in the Levant is intimately connected to the agricultural narrative of the Fertile Crescent, a region renowned for the contributions of its ancient civilizations. However, the emergence of silk reeling in Mount Lebanon marked a pivotal turning point in the region's labor dynamics and the advent of a globalized labor market. The earliest evidence of the practice of silk reeling and the cultivation of mulberry trees in Mount Lebanon and other parts of *Bilad al-Sham* can be traced back to the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Firro 1990).

By the 19th century, Ottoman rule prompted a shift from subsistence economies to monoculture cash-crops, particularly silk, catering to European demands. Power shifted to local merchants acting as intermediaries between peasant farmers and the French

market. Two increasingly distinct Christian merchant classes dominated the economy of the time – the primarily landowning merchant aristocracy composed of Greek Orthodox families (Sursuq, Bustrus, Trad, Tuwayni, etc.) and the Greek Catholic newcomers of Syrian origin (Chiha and Pharaon) which established themselves as the local bourgeoisie through the silk economy (Traboulsi 2012).

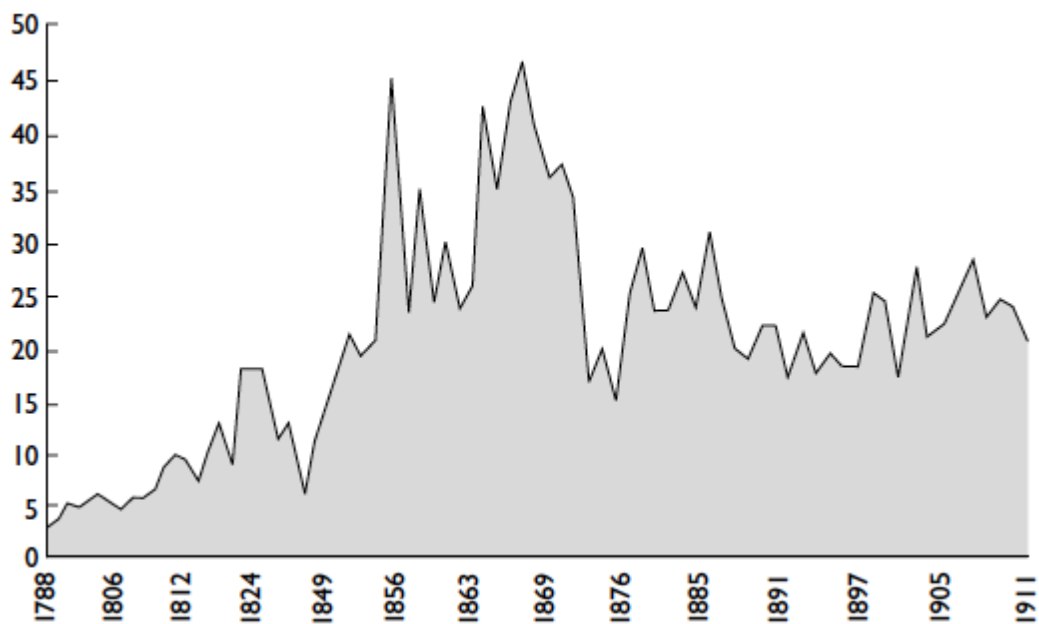


Figure 2. Price (in piastres) of one *oke* of silk cocoons from 1788-1911. From Kais Firro.

Period	Beirut Silk Export Value		Beirut Total Export Value		% Silk of Total Export Value
	£	FF	£	FF	
1853-1857	257,721	6,494,568			
1884-1888	417,680	10,525,536	680,216	17,141,460	61.4
1889-1893	610,983	15,396,780	755,312	19,033,875	89
1894-1898	487,127	12,275,600	726,981	18,319,921	67
1899-1903	514,212	12,958,142	724,069	18,246,539	71
1904-1908	668,000	16,833,600	969,270	24,425,604	68.9
1909-1913	460,000	11,592,000	649,117	26,357,740	70.8

Figure 3. Value of silk exports handled at Port of Beirut and its share in overall exports, 1853-1913 (yearly average). From Kais Firro.

The growing silk trade between 1820 and 1918 led to the establishment of Beirut as the capital city of a separate Ottoman *wilayet* by the same name in 1887. The Beirut *wilayet* enticed heavy French and European investment, injecting capital in the core infrastructural and communication projects of the city such as the first telegraphic link with Europe in 1858, the 110-kilometer carriage road between Beirut and Damascus in 1863, and the construction of a new harbor beginning in 1895 (Traboulsi 2012).

By this time, half of Mount Lebanon's population were engaged in the silk trade (Traboulsi 2012). Furthermore, "some 14,500 workers worked in the silk-reeling factories, 12,000 of whom were women, with an overall majority of Maronites... Working conditions were harsh, working hours were long and salaries were excessively low" (Traboulsi 2012). Traboulsi goes on to explain that although women and children were extensively employed in the trade, men earned three times more than women and children were sometimes not paid at all by way of orphanage labor. By 1914, 80% of Mount Lebanon's cultivated land was dedicated to mulberry trees, employing local villagers and as a result requiring food imports from Greater Syria to feed the local population (Firro 1990). The sericulture phenomenon transformed Mount Lebanon into a cash crop region entirely dependent on the Bekaa and the Syrian interior for two-thirds of its cereals and livestock needs (Traboulsi 2012). Between 1840 and 1873, the market transitioned from three-quarters of the silk being consumed locally to more than 40 percent reaching the French market. By the early 1900s concomitantly with the rise in the value of silk exports, this rate reached 90 percent. The silk trade flourished at the expense of the various other sectors of the economy, leaving the early Lebanese economy precariously reliant on a volatile disease-prone export-oriented cash crop and thus the dictates of foreign markets (Traboulsi 2012) (Firro 1990).

### 3.2 Greater Lebanon & the independence era (1915-1943)

*Here are the ghost villages, inhabited by unemployment, laziness and desolation. Nothing remains except factories and churches to console you of their disappearance... Here is the lost wealth, lamented by the newspapers... and the gentlemen dressed in European attire. National pride, dressed in artificial silk, eat their bread drenched in the sweat of Africa.*

- Amin al-Rihani, *Qalb Lubnan* (1965)

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the modern Middle East nation-states, the separate economies of the 20th century generally flourished, especially Lebanon. The French Mandate of Lebanon, created in 1920, expanded the country's borders to include predominantly Muslim regions, which laid the foundation for the sectarian balance that characterizes Lebanon's political system today. However, this expansion also exacerbated social and political divisions that would later contribute to conflicts and tensions within the country.

The French Mandate era saw significant investments in infrastructure, education, and public administration, which helped shape the modern Lebanese state. However, the French administration's economic policies also led to a high degree of reliance on the silk trade and other export-oriented colonial byproducts, making the economy vulnerable to external shocks. When the silk trade suffered a decline due to the global economic downturn and changing consumer preferences, Lebanon faced severe economic consequences. During the 1920s and 1930s, the heavy dependence on the silk trade led to further reverberations of famine in Lebanon, as the country's agricultural sector was oriented towards the export-oriented cash crop. Thousands of people died of starvation due to this economic imbalance, highlighting the dangers of relying on a single industry. Traboulsi in his historical account evokes the decline of the silk trade:

“In ‘Akkar, the Biqa’ and the south, French governors backed big landowners who became the main beneficiaries from government aid and projects of agricultural development. Paradoxically, sericulture, one of the original reasons for French interest in Lebanon, hardly survived its crisis of the 1920s and finally collapsed in the 1930s, contributing to a new wave of emigration” (Traboulsi 2012).

This heavy reliance on silk, in the end, allowed for monoculture agriculture to take root in Lebanon, leaving the population without prospects for work and the continued possibility of famines due to their complete transition from farming edible food crops to mulberry trees for silk production.

The early years of independence were marked by political stability and the formation of a national identity. However, the National Pact of 1943, which aimed to ensure political representation and maintain social harmony, also institutionalized the sectarian divisions within the country. This power-sharing agreement sowed the seeds for future tensions and conflicts by entrenching the confessional system within the Lebanese political structure.

### **3.3 The merchant republic (1943-1952) & the cracks of social crisis (to 1974)**



Figure 4. Martyr's Square circa 1972. From Lebanon in a Picture.



Lebanon's economic boom between 1943 and 1952 was fueled by a combination of factors, including increased trade and investment, favorable political alliances, and the rise of a skilled and educated workforce. During this period, Lebanon's laissez-faire economic model attracted foreign investors and transformed the country into a regional hub for commerce, banking, and tourism (Chalcraft 2007). The economy experienced rapid growth, particularly in the service and financial sectors, giving rise to the moniker "The Merchant Republic." However, beneath the surface of this prosperity, the seeds of social crisis were being sown. The government's focus on bolstering the financial and service sectors left other sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, underdeveloped. This imbalance created an economic structure heavily reliant on a limited number of industries, which in turn led to an increasing income inequality.

As the wealthy merchant class accumulated more wealth and political influence, a significant portion of the population, including rural farmers and low-wage urban workers, was left struggling to make ends meet (Traboulsi 2012). The government's failure to implement effective labor policies and social safety nets further exacerbated this divide. These social and economic disparities fueled tensions between different religious and ethnic communities, many of whom felt marginalized by the ruling elite. In addition, the rapid urbanization brought about by the economic boom led to overcrowding in major cities, placing immense strain on infrastructure and social services. The lack of affordable housing, inadequate public transportation, and limited access to basic services, such as healthcare and education, contributed to the growing discontent among the populace. The irony is that while the supposed "Merchant Republic" breathed life into a free market economy, the economy that developed post-

independence was anything but. What formed instead was a commercial/financial oligarchy made up of about 30 well-known mostly Christian families (24 Christian and only 6 Sunni, Shi'ite and Druze combined) who intermingled and tightened their oligarchical bonds through marriage. This nucleus of powerful families came to be known as the "Consortium" (Traboulsi 2012). The Consortium had their hands in nearly all sectors of the economy and played a major part in transitioning it into a republic of banks (Traboulsi 2012). As Charles Issawi recalls in his account of this era:

"It is true that Lebanon owes to foreign mission schools, and particularly to the two universities in Beirut, its greatest single asset: an educated population. It is also true that French capital helped to develop the silk industry, laid down first the road and then the railway to Damascus, built a modern port in Beirut, and installed some banks and public utilities. But the bulk of economic, including commercial, activity remained in the hands of native Lebanese, mainly Christians" (Issawi 1964).

The cracks in the social fabric of Lebanon during the Merchant Republic era ultimately culminated in protests and strikes, demanding better wages, working conditions, and social protections. The government's inability to address these grievances, coupled with the underlying sectarian divisions reinforced by elite privileges to certain groups especially the French favoritism towards their fellow Maronites, paved the way for the turmoil and instability that would define the decades to come.

### **3.4 The Civil War era (1975-1990)**

*Some celebrated these characteristics as Lebanon's comparative advantage in the region, often by drawing on the ideas of Michel Chiha (1891–1954), a Catholic banker and prominent constitutional lawyer who regarded laissez-faire as both an economic imperative for the country's open and trade-based economy and as a major ingredient of Lebanon's national identity. In contrast, others saw in laissez-faire a major source of society's inequalities, a cause of its lopsided development solely based on "financial-mercantile capital," a source of its regional and sectarian tensions, and even as having contributed to the civil strife culminating in the wars of the 1970s and 1980s. But despite their disagreements regarding the desirability of laissez-faire, both its*

*advocates and its critics argued that, to a large extent, the country's tradition in minimal state intervention has continued to characterize major policy domains in the 1990s.*

- Reinoud Leenders, "Nobody Having too Much to Answer for: Laissez-Faire, Networks, and Postwar Reconstruction in Lebanon" (2004)

The Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, had far-reaching consequences for the country's labor landscape and socio-economic fabric. The war severely disrupted Lebanon's economy, as businesses and infrastructure were destroyed, and foreign investments and tourism dwindled. As a result, joblessness and poverty rates surged, with many Lebanese citizens either losing their jobs or being forced to take on low-paying, informal work to survive. The war also caused a massive brain drain phenomenon, as a significant portion of the educated and skilled workforce fled the country to escape the violence and seek better opportunities abroad. The conflict further exacerbated the already existing socio-economic inequalities in Lebanon, as wealth and resources became concentrated among a small group of powerful elites, often linked to the warring factions. Meanwhile, most of the population suffered from inadequate access to basic services, education, and healthcare. The government's inability to provide for the needs of its citizens led to the rise of various non-state actors, such as militias and religious organizations, which stepped in to fill the vacuum left by the state. Lebanon's labor market also witnessed a significant influx of foreign workers, primarily from Syria and Palestine, who were willing to work for lower wages. This influx further intensified competition for scarce jobs and resources, adding to the tensions between different communities.

The war took a heavy toll on Lebanon's social fabric, fostering a climate of mistrust and animosity between various religious and ethnic groups that would persist

long after the conflict's end. Lebanese capitalism expanded while in parallel social stratification and sectarian divisions were exacerbated. The trend of mass migration from rural areas into the city directly brushed up against the traditional sectarian leadership, forming grassroots movements that eventually erupted into discontent and social protest. There is a tendency to paint the Civil War as purely political or sectarian fueled, while the state of economic discontent and long-term social crisis is downplayed (Baumann 2019). The Taif Agreement, signed in 1989, eventually laid the groundwork for the conflict's "resolution" and the country's post-war reconstruction. However, the legacy of the Civil War continued to shape Lebanon's labor market and socio-economic dynamics for years to come, with the lingering effects of the conflict still evident in the country's deeply divided society and fragile economy.

### **3.5 1990's neoliberal reconstruction era & Rafiq Hariri**

The end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 marked the beginning of a new era for the country, characterized by a push for reconstruction and economic liberalization. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who served multiple terms during the 1990s and early 2000s, Lebanon embarked on a series of ambitious neoliberal reforms aimed at revitalizing the war-torn economy and attracting foreign investment. Drawing from Hannes Baumann's "Citizen Hariri," this section explores the impact of these policies on Lebanon's labor market and socio-economic landscape. Hariri's vision for post-war Lebanon was heavily influenced by his own background as a businessman and entrepreneur. Hariri believed that by embracing neoliberal policies, such as privatization, deregulation, and fiscal austerity, Lebanon could transform itself into a prosperous, market-driven economy. Central to this vision was the reconstruction of Beirut's city center by Hariri's own private company Solidere. The massive urban

development project effectively destroyed the cultural elements of the city's downtown space and filled it with luxury brand stores that today predominantly sits empty and emits an eerily post-apocalyptic film scene aesthetic. Baumann describes the neoliberal urbanism exploitation set in motion by Hariri and his cronies in the government:

“The state played a central role by transferring and securing property rights to the private developer. The CDR, the very agency that had been founded as a highly autonomous state instrument of Chehabist technocrats in 1977, partnered with Solidere in developing central Beirut. Solidere was an example of neoliberal urbanism, where the state enables accumulation at the urban scale. Much of this accumulation was driven by Gulf capital, not least Hariri himself, who was a major shareholder in Solidere” (Baumann 2019).

While these neoliberal reforms lead to some short-term economic growth and a resurgence of foreign investment, they also had significant downsides. One of the most notable consequences was the growing income inequality and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. The privatization of key sectors, such as telecommunications and utilities, often resulted in monopolies controlled by politically connected elites. This led to inflated prices and limited access for the average citizen, further exacerbating socio-economic disparities (Dibeh, Fakh, and Marrouh 2017) (Baumann 2019; 2016). Additionally, Hariri's focus on attracting foreign investment and promoting Lebanon as a financial hub led to a neglect of the country's productive sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing. As a result, the Lebanese economy became increasingly dependent on the service sector and remittances from the Lebanese diaspora, making it more vulnerable to external shocks and financial crises (Baumann 2019). The inoculation of neoliberal policies in the 1990s had a profound impact on the labor market. The emphasis on the service sector led to a surge in demand for low-skilled, low-wage jobs, often filled by migrant workers from countries like Syria, Egypt, and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the lack of investment in productive sectors and

education meant that many young, educated Lebanese faced limited job opportunities and were often compelled to seek employment abroad.

The legacy of Rafiq Hariri's neoliberal reconstruction era can still be felt in Lebanon today. The long-term consequences of these policies have contributed to the deep-rooted socio-economic problems that continue to plague the nation. The unequal distribution of wealth, the erosion of social safety nets, and the reliance on an unstable, service-oriented economy have all played a role in shaping Lebanon's current economic and labor market crises (Baumann 2019; 2016).

### 3.6 The Lebanese laborscape today



Figure 5. First ever "civil parade" calls for local industry at the Independence Day procession during the October Revolution. From Hiba Al Kallas, November 22, 2019.

Lebanon has been dubbed the “Switzerland of the Middle East” not so much for its culture, society, or physical geography but rather for the financial engineering that took place in the post-Civil War construction era resulting in a massive banking industry and imbalanced economy. “A distinction owing more to the banking secrecy of its financial institutions than to its mountains” (Ricour-Brasseur, Middle East Eye, 2021). As was shown through the historical analysis, the relationship between the two can be traced back to the silk trade in the late 16th century in Mount Lebanon. While

the banking industry grew throughout the centuries, the productive sectors of the economy were effectively extinguished, and privatization was left unchecked and unfettered. The institutional capacities of the state deteriorated during this period, degrading its autonomy and authority over the provision of services. The defining features of the Lebanese “laborscape” begins with the introduction of silk cultivation and trade into the economy of Mount Lebanon and Greater Syria and resulted in the growing need for a banking industry to handle the profits and circulate loans for the silk farmers. This in turn created a local merchant class which formed the roots of the corrupt elite class of today’s compounding economic crises.

The contemporary Lebanese “laborscape” is characterized by deep-rooted structural issues that have their origins in the historical developments outlined above. The decline of productive sectors, the rise of the banking industry, and the unchecked privatization of essential services have all contributed to the current economic and labor market crises facing the country. These factors, in combination with high levels of corruption and a fragmented political landscape, have led to a precarious situation for the Lebanese workforce, particularly for the educated youth.

One of the most pressing challenges in the Lebanese labor market today is the high rate of joblessness and informal work, particularly among the youth. This is partly due to the lack of investment in productive sectors, as well as the mismatch between the skills acquired by Lebanese youth through their education and the demands of the job market. The educated youth in Lebanon face a labor market characterized by informality and a lack of job security. In reference to student protest movements of the last decade, Sukarieh and Tannock contend that: “In some countries, such as Egypt and Lebanon, protesters’ interests were narrowly focused on the concerns of the current

generation of students not future generations, and of middle- and upperclass students not those from the working class and poor” (Sukarieh and Tannock 2015). It is for this reason that the focus of my research has been on the joblessness of the educated youth. Many young people are forced to accept temporary or informal jobs, often in the gig economy or service sector, with few benefits and little stability. This has led to a phenomenon known as "brain drain," as many educated Lebanese youth choose to seek better opportunities abroad, further weakening the country's human capital and long-term economic prospects. The reliance on migrant labor, particularly in low-skilled jobs, has also contributed to the challenges facing the Lebanese workforce. While migrant workers have played a crucial role in supporting the growth of the service sector, they often face exploitation and discrimination. Moreover, a large migrant workforce has been associated with the suppression of wages and erosion of labor rights, as employers can exploit the vulnerability of migrant workers to cut costs.

The ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon, marked by soaring inflation, currency devaluation, and a severe shortage of essential goods, has further exacerbated the challenges faced by the Lebanese workforce. As the cost of living continues to rise, even those with stable employment are struggling to make ends meet, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and unrest. In conclusion, the Lebanese laborscape today is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, economic, and political factors. Addressing these deeply rooted issues will require a comprehensive and coordinated approach, focusing on reviving the productive sectors, promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, and ensuring that the benefits of economic development are shared equitably among all segments of society and not exclusively to the benefit of non-governmental organizations pushing their agendas in the Third World.



## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDY: DALEEL MADANI AND THE NEA

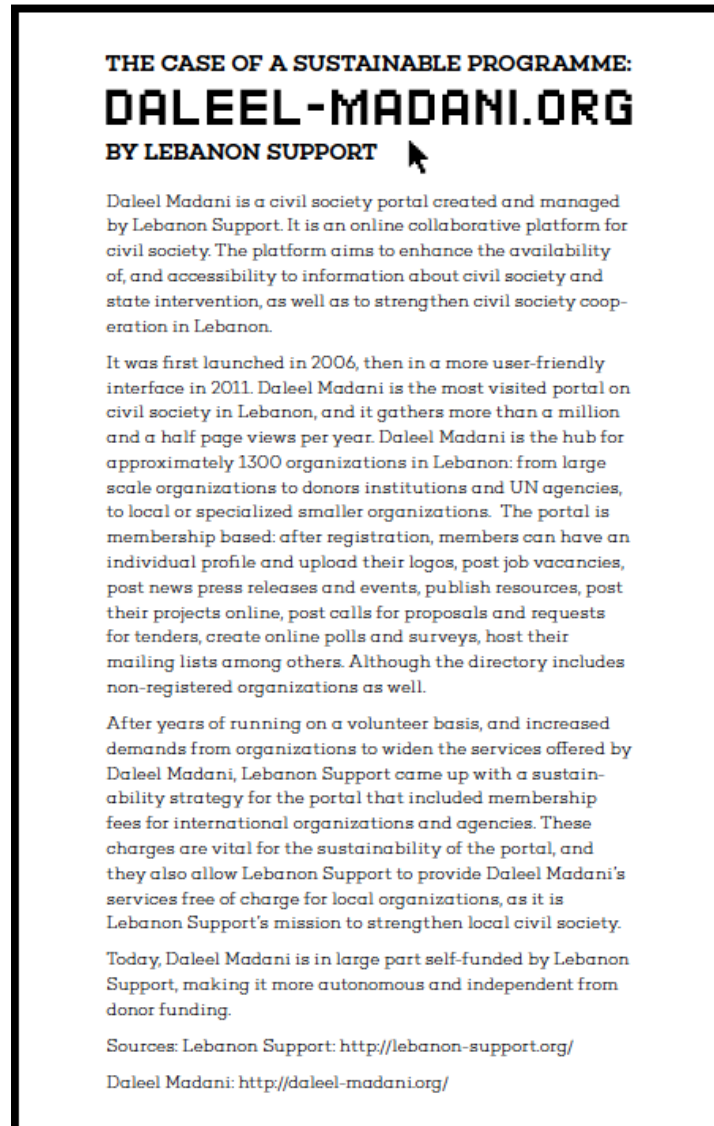


Figure 6 Information praising the work of Daleel Madani. From *The Basic Guidebook for Emerging Collectives, Cooperatives & NGOs in Lebanon*.

To shed light on the ever-growing role of NGOs in conducting the affairs of civil society in Lebanon and the interrelated massive youth joblessness, it would be constructive to analyze the role of Daleel Madani in intercepting the key functions of the defunct National Employment Agency. Although Daleel Madani does not fit the

mold precisely as the type of service provision of a government institution, it has become far more known than its counterpart which should signal to the crippled state of such government institutions. By closely examining the services and initiatives offered by Daleel Madani and the funding to operate such a platform, as well as the broader context of the labor market crisis in Lebanon, this case study aims to understand the implications of this shift in responsibility from state institutions to NGOs. As such, it is necessary to understand the problematic nature of relinquishing state services to non-governmental organizations sent in to fill the gaps and profit in the process. The analysis will also explore potential solutions and recommendations for addressing the labor market challenges and improving the effectiveness of government institutions in Lebanon.

#### **4.1 Neoliberal policymaking & the global development aid industry**

In the era of neoliberal globalization, NGOs have often been described as having emerged as a third wheel or a third pillar in the global political economy, complementing the roles of the state and the market by addressing social and developmental needs that have been neglected or exacerbated by both (Gürcan 2021) (Harvey 2005). To point to the development and aid industry as a backchannel of “disciplining the Middle East”, there are three main contentions made clear by the bulk of research on the topic. First, the development industry has created a cyclical pattern of dependence on its services, in this case controlling the labor market and its narrative i.e., “unemployment”. Second, the modern imperial project necessitates some form of intervention into its former colonies and does so through the maintenance of neoliberal policies through international institutions and funding. Third, the expanding civil

society space in the form of NGOs operate identically to the corporate structure, informing and co-opting decision-making and policymaking based on the global market and creating competition in the pursuit of funding.

To effectively frame the analysis, it is helpful to begin with a discussion of the historical “neoliberal turn” which resulted in shifts in political-economic organization from ‘embedded liberalism’ after the Second World War to neoliberalism restructuring in the 1980s. In his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey charts and analyzes this “neoliberal turn” and the resulting social changes directly and indirectly affiliated with it. Harvey attempts to answer how and why neoliberalism of all socio-economic systems emerged as the answer to the economic failures of the 1970s and largely departing from the “grounded capital accumulation” (Harvey 2005). He states, “Neoliberalism as a potential antidote to threats to the capitalist social order and as a solution to capitalism’s ills had long been lurking in the wings of public policy” (Harvey 2005). In the chapter entitled “Cultural imperialism and the nonprofit-corporate complex,” Gürcan describes how this phenomenon has restructured and preserved the contemporary imperial system globally (Gürcan, 2022). By imperialism, Gürcan adopts several definitions addressing state policies in encouraging militaristic expansion and hegemony through neoliberal capitalism (Gürcan, 2022). In Lenin’s view, “the characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world, as we now see, being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and powerful armed forces” and not simply policy choices or practices.

In exploring the relationship between the “nonprofit-corporate complex” and the cultural dynamics of imperialism, some answers about the proliferation of NGOs may

be found in the massive growth of US development aid. After the growth of the Gulf oil-producing states power and subsequent injection of petrodollars into New York investment banks, the US found a sustainable solution to its newfound investment funds and in the process protecting its foreign interests (Harvey 2005). This translated into a shift from colonialism to a more flexible system of imperialism. From 1970 to 2013, US development assistance grew from \$3 billion to \$30 billion according to the OECD. Journalists, academics, aid workers, technical experts and economists alike have been faced with this “humanitarian dilemma” - while billions of dollars are flowing into the Third World yearly, often the money either does little to change the situation on the ground or ends up in the pockets of the individuals or groups culpable in the crises overwhelming their nations in the first place (Harvey 2005).

Nonetheless, the implications extend beyond this point; the basic underlying nature of development aid is in question by critical scholars today. The global apparatus designed to bring relief and development to the world has in effect carved out a foothold in the policymaking space of the countries they fund, further pushing the neoliberal neocolonial subjugation of the Third World to Western ideals. Moreover, many non-governmental not-for-profit organizations operate structurally identical to corporations with policies informed by the state of the global financial market (Gürcan 2021). For the sake of engaging with the tangible effects of the stunted labor market, the relationship between the neoliberal agenda and policymaking to curb “unemployment” figures is also relevant. In this case, the term “unemployment” emerged as a central part of state knowledge production in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century economic downturn and later in the political discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Denning 2016). It therefore stands to reason to question the “nonprofit-corporate complex” and the covert agenda of the

development aid industry in sustaining the West's, mainly the US, hegemony in the Middle East.

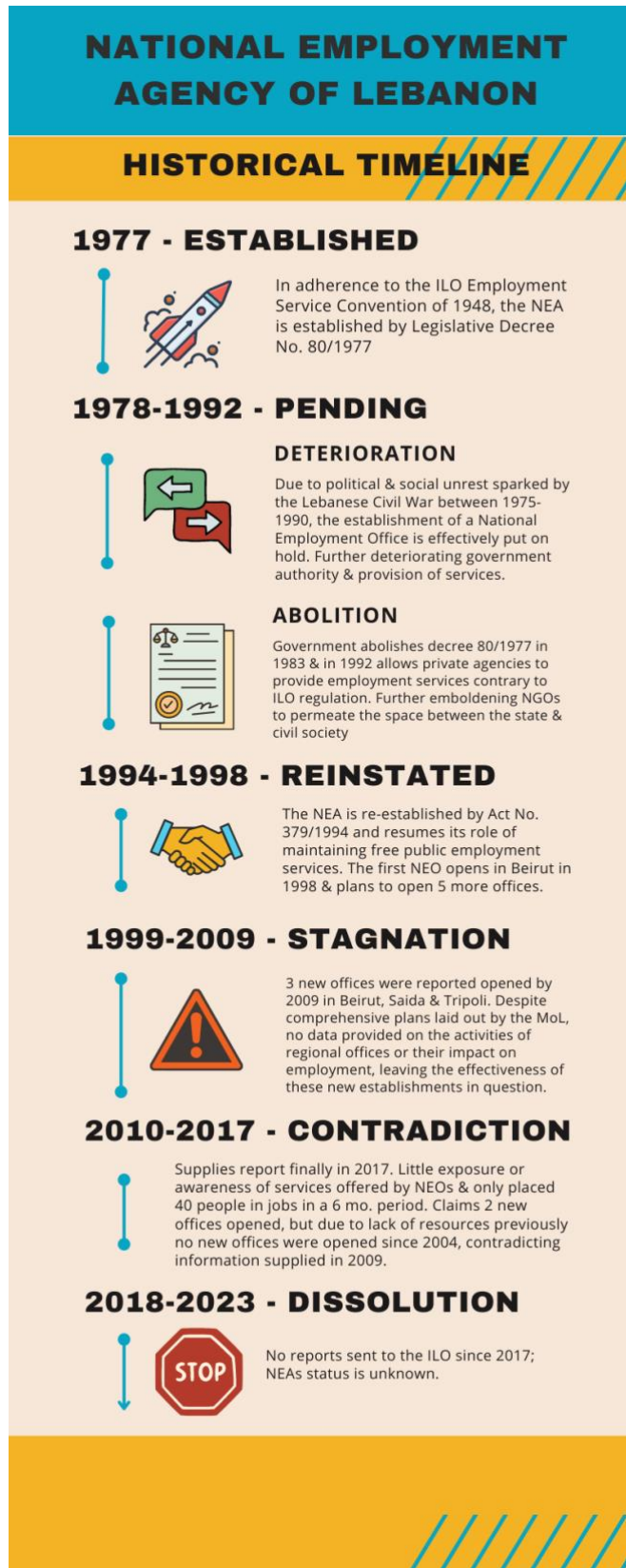


Figure 7 “National Employment Agency of Lebanon: Historical Timeline”. Created by the author using Canva, 2023. Data retrieved from CEACR comments on Lebanon.

## **4.2 Timeline of NEA Adherence to the ILO**

Lebanon became a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1948 and is expected to follow and implement international labor standards as established by the international organization. According to Article 1.1 of the Employment Service Convention of 1948 (No. 88) “Each Member of the International Labour Organisation for which this Convention is in force shall maintain or ensure the maintenance of a free public employment service.” As part of the plan to combat joblessness under ILO guidance, the National Employment Agency (NEA) was established by Legislative Decree No. 80 in 1977 with the goal of managing several office branches throughout the country. Decree No. 2019 was issued to organize its principles of operation and Decree No. 2020 to determine the specific directive of staffing 108 employees to run its daily operations. The institutions were planning based on the civil war nearing a resolution and making headway in the rebuilding of the country, however this did not come to fruition until more than a decade later. As a result, the National Employment Agency was merged with the Ministry of Labor, and its various functions and employees were absorbed into other labor departments or suspended by Decree No. 157 in 1983 (Legal Agenda, Ayoub, 2019). Since the resolution of the Civil War in 1990, the ILO with its proceedings of the yearly International Labour Conference (ILC) through the CEACR committee has repeatedly requested the government’s reports on the activities of the NEA (ILO 2023). In 1992, when the Lebanese government reported its dissolution of the legislative decree of the NEA, it effectively eliminated the free public employment services and allowed the private employment agencies and private establishments to fulfill the role of the state.

It was not until the reconstruction era in 1994 by repeal of Decree 157/83 that the NEO resumed its independent functions with the reinstatement of Decree 80/1977 (Legal Agenda, Ayoub, 2019). Since its inception in 1977, however, the NEA has been entirely neglected and as a result civil society has leaned on NGOs and other civil society organizations to fill the gaps, namely Daleel Madani in the case of labor market services (Legal Agenda, Ayoub, 2019). According to an article by Legal Agenda, the countless people they interviewed had no awareness of the NEAs existence or what its role entailed (Legal Agenda, 2019). If anything, they were surprised that such an institution was at some points in operation and providing such services in Lebanon.

The first free public employment office was opened in Beirut in early 1998 with no information about how it plans to achieve its goals of opening more offices and more efficient coordination between employers and workers. Finally, it reported no coordination or supervision of private employment agencies. It took the government from 2005 until October 2009 to respond to the direct request and supply the requested reports (ILO 2023). Between 2010 and 2016 the Lebanese government continued to disregard the ILO Committee's yearly requests for reports regarding the NEA. In 2017, it delivered a report that two additional employment offices were inaugurated in Tripoli and Saida in addition to the Beirut office and that no additional offices were opened since 2004 due to a lack of resources although it had previously reported having opened three offices in 2009. In a six-month period between January and August of 2015, they received 225 employment applications, 85 vacancies were notified and only 40 jobseekers were able to secure employment (ILO 2023). This institution's extreme ineptitude is made clear from the direct reporting provided to the ILO by the National Employment Agency. In providing this detailed timeline of the government's



relationship with the ILO, it should point to its deep failures in adhering to the international standards of labor. Furthermore, the numerous instances of missing government reports and contradictions in the information should show the ineffectiveness and disorganization of the state's employment services.

The existence of NGOs like Lebanon Support and its platform Daleel Madani undercuts the need for a functioning National Employment Agency. For a tiny nation of approximately 5.3 million people, Daleel Madani receiving an average of 50 requests for registration monthly is massive and obstructive and further reveals this larger trend of the deterioration of government services side by side with the growth of the non-governmental sector.

#### **4.3 Drowning in civil society organizations**

When referring to civil society organizations (CSOs) in the context of Lebanon, NGOs reign supreme – with peak NGO creation occurring in parallel with the incessant socio-economic crises plunging the government into a semi-permanent state of suspension. The growth booms of CSOs in Lebanon both historical and contemporary has had a direct parallel with societal changes and times of crisis. In contemporary Lebanese affairs, we can point to several distinct turning points – 1960s and 1970s influx of Palestinian refugees, the Lebanese Civil War, the 1990s reconstruction era under Hariri, the 2006 July War, post 2011 influx of Syrian refugees, and finally the 2019 economic collapse. The correlation between the unrestrained growth of civil society organizations (particularly NGOs) and the Lebanese Civil War period is especially significant. Between 1975 and 1990, CSOs shifted their focus from religious, social, and economic activism to relief and development especially in the context of the

governance void left by the Civil War (Beyond Reform and Development BRD/I 2015). The failures of the neoliberal policies put into motion by former president Rafiq Hariri in the post-war reconstruction era had dire effects on the economy thus the civil society space.

“Through various mechanisms, such as wage repression or financialisation, the neoliberal restructuring of state and economy has increased profits and reduced wages, thus reversing the cooperative relationship between capital and labour that had marked the previous phase of ‘embedded liberalism’ from the 1950s to the 1970s.” (Baumann 2016)

One such institution that has been affected by the neoliberal restructuring is the Ministry of Labor. After the veil was lifted in 2019 and the reality of the tattered economy revealed, the people lost the little remaining confidence in the government and its corresponding institutions. This severe lack of confidence in the state’s capacities can lead to societal dependence on non-state organizations and an underlying assumption that by their mere existence and funding from the West that these organizations can fill the gaps and provide services preserved for a functioning state.

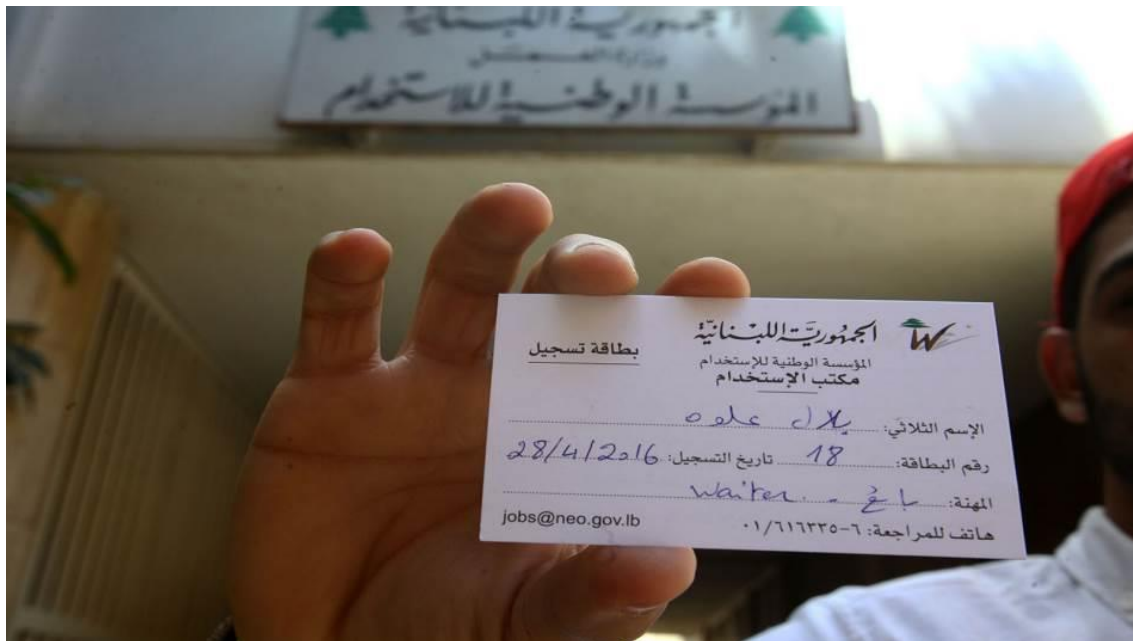


Figure 8. The defunct NEO registers youth in "First Job Opportunity for Youth" project in 2016. Retrieved from Al-Modon writer Haifa Al-Banna.

Daleel Madani is a civil directory launched in 2006 by the organization Lebanon Support and consists of a network of more than 1,300 civil society actors. It is commonly known throughout the country as a platform one can use to locate job opportunities and connect with potential projects and employers. Although it touts itself as a “civil society network” which aims to “strengthen cooperation, thus limiting duplication of work, and enhancing the civil society sector”, it predominantly focuses on sectors directly related to the administration and management of non-governmental organizations and the development and aid industry and their countless projects around the country. From its about page, Daleel Madani claims it is “the most regularly updated and used site by civil society organizations in Lebanon since 2006, and gathers over 1 million page views per month from users around the world.” That equates to one fifth of the population of Lebanon viewing their online platform on a monthly basis. The emergence of Daleel Madani is part of a larger development in the dramatic growth in civil society associations since the early postwar period as noted by Kingston. He continues in the chapter “Struggling for Civic Space” that “the number of associations increased in the 1990s at an annual rate of 250, creating by the end of the decade a sector that ranged between 4,000 and 6,000 organizations” (Kingston, 2013). It is also worth shedding light on the vast mobilization capacity of people categorized under this umbrella “associational” sector. As of 2001 according to the World Bank this number was in excess of 100,000 people.

Daleel Madani is itself aware of this oversaturation of the civil society space in Lebanon; through its research arm “Civil Society Knowledge Centre” it regularly publishes the work of local critical scholars, the co-director of the center Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi included. In her report, she adopts the broad definition of civil society used by Kingston as the “realm that exists between the state, the market, and the individual” (Kingston, 2013:6). AbiYaghi goes on to say, “it hence encompasses formal and informal structures, community associations (*jam'iyat ahlia*), non-governmental organizations, syndicates, cooperatives, faith-based organizations, and trade unions, amongst others” (AbiYaghi, 2018). Simply by examining the titles of many works produced by AbiYaghi, one can get a general understanding of her perspective on the decline of state institutions and expansion of NGOs in the civil space. The staff writers of the Civil Society Knowledge Centre have even produced an enticing highly stylized guidebook explaining in detail the process of starting an NGO, cooperative or collective in Lebanon, from ideation to registering with authorities to designing programs to securing funds. When deciding what type of organization you would like to establish, the writers recommend, “why not mix and match as you see fit?” (Lebanon Support

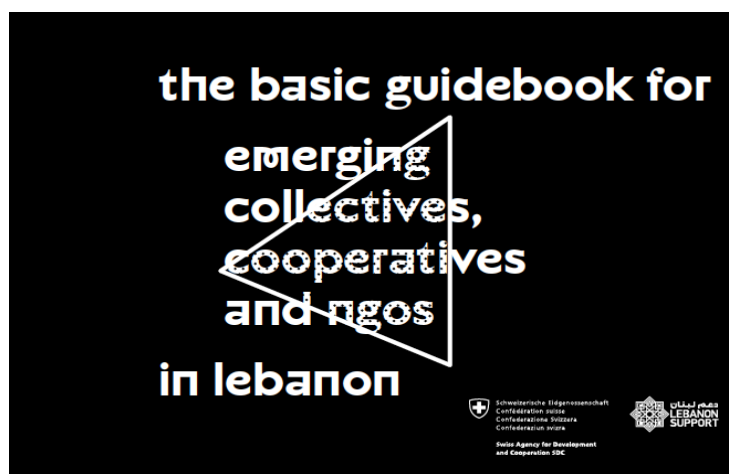


Figure 9. The cover to Lebanon Support's guidebook on starting a CSO in Lebanon. From Lebanon Support.

2016). The guidebook provides their own official and legal registration templates at the end for the public to use if they wanted to start their own organization. In one section, the guide team boasts about “Volunteerism 101”, in other words, how to take advantage of the jobless class in maintaining “sustainable volunteerism” due to “the mere fact that they may have the time” (Lebanon Support 2016).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUDING REMARKS: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS AT THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

Table 2.6: Distribution of Employment among the Self-Employed

	No formal	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
<b>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</b>	2%	3%	1%	0%	<b>5%</b>
<b>Mining and quarrying</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	1%	5%	1%	1%	<b>8%</b>
<b>Electricity, water and gas</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>1%</b>
<b>Construction</b>	1%	5%	2%	1%	<b>8%</b>
<b>Low Services*</b>	6%	33%	15%	6%	<b>61%</b>
<b>High Productivity Services**</b>	0%	1%	0%	2%	<b>3%</b>
<b>Administration/education/health</b>	0%	0%	0%	2%	<b>3%</b>
<b>Other</b>	1%	5%	4%	1%	<b>11%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: World Bank, 2010 Employer-Employee Survey

Note: \* wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles; transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities, real estate activities; \*\*information and communication; financial and insurance activities; professional, scientific and technical activities

Figure 11. Distribution of sectors among self-employed workers. From World Bank Employer-Employee Survey 2010.

Table 2.5: Distribution of Employment among Wage Employees

	No formal	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
<b>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</b>	0.4%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%	<b>1.2%</b>
<b>Mining and quarrying</b>	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	<b>0.7%</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	0.9%	5.4%	1.8%	3.1%	<b>11.3%</b>
<b>Electricity, water and gas</b>	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%	0.1%	<b>0.9%</b>
<b>Construction</b>	0.1%	1.6%	0.8%	1.0%	<b>3.5%</b>
<b>Low Services*</b>	1.2%	10.6%	13.9%	9.7%	<b>35.4%</b>
<b>High Productivity**</b>	0.1%	1.7%	1.7%	10.7%	<b>14.3%</b>
<b>Administration/education/health</b>	0.7%	5.2%	6.9%	16.1%	<b>29.0%</b>
<b>Other</b>	0.0%	1.4%	1.0%	1.3%	<b>3.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>26.9%</b>	<b>42.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: World Bank, 2010 Employer-Employee Survey

Note: \* wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles; transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities, real estate activities; \*\*information and communication; financial and insurance activities; professional, scientific and technical activities

Figure 10. Distribution of sectors among waged workers in Lebanon. From World Bank Employer-Employee Survey 2010.

According to data from the National Youth Policy Document in 2012, youth joblessness had by that point summited 34% and more interesting is the variable between “unemployment” among upper secondary graduates, 21.8%, and university graduates, 36.1% (Abou Jaoude 2015). If we attempt to make sense of these figures and

fill in the context glossed over by data, there is a contradictory phenomenon occurring. As previously mentioned, many “unemployment” studies indicate a serious disconnect between jobs created and jobs needed. While it continued to grow throughout the years, the Lebanese economy continuously produced less jobs than people joining the labor market yearly which remains one of the main labor market challenges (Abou Jaoude 2015). Ironically, while students continue to pursue higher education degrees with hopes of obtaining high-skilled jobs in various fields of study, vacancies resulting from “the discrepancy between the profiles and jobseekers and the requirements of vacant jobs” is massive. Abou Jaoude, through his research on UNDP (United Nations Development Program) data, sheds light on this discrepancy that many of the productive industries, such as the industrial and tourism sectors, with 15,000 and 30,000 available jobs respectively remain unfulfilled (Abou Jaoude 2015). The main target audience of the job platform of Daleel Madani are the educated youth pursuing salaries in USD. Of the nearly 230 jobs posted on the platform at the time of writing, only 11 jobs are offered to students with only a high school diploma, three jobs require no degree, four jobs require some form of technical degree, and seven jobs are listed as “other”. Alternately, 170 jobs require a bachelor’s and 30 require a master’s degree. This has had serious implications on the types of sectors and industries that have grown over the decades. This evidence points to the trend that the agriculture, education, crafts, manual labor, construction etc. sectors have been entirely neglected by organizations like Daleel Madani attempting to increase employment rates in the country. For the country to be capable of employing the entirety of its workforce, jobseekers must have incentive to be trained in a spectrum of professions be they manual, technical or otherwise.

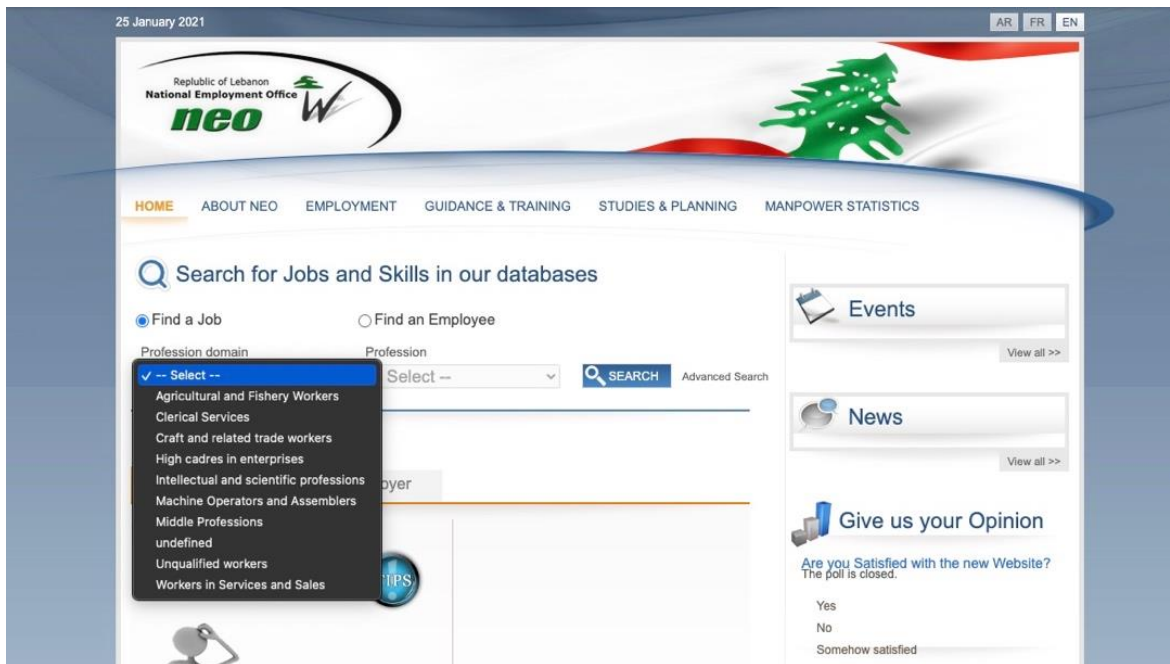


Figure 12. An archive of the NEO e-portal showing the types of industries in which jobseekers may find work as of 2021. The e-portal is currently inactive. From the Wayback Machine <http://neo.gov.lb/>.

The imperial agenda of the West becomes all the more difficult to resist when a predominant proportion of a nation’s workforce’s wages and livelihoods are tied up in the NGO and development sector. Language inherent to the development and aid industry are problematic in their definition, connotation and usage throughout NGOs programming goals and reporting to donors. Two main concepts emerge often and ceaselessly: “resilience” and “empowerment”, which Daleel Madani and its sister association Lebanon Support use blindly without any concern for the usage of such language. This uncritical adoption of terms is reminiscent of the broader neoliberal project, as Harvey points out: “It has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration or reconstitution of naked



class power, locally as well as transnationally, but most particularly in the main financial centres of global capitalism.” The use of such language often masks the underlying power dynamics and reinforces dependency on external aid and donor organizations. As a result of this dynamic, external governments and donor organizations ultimately begin to have more authority in the shaping of policies of a state than the people or the state itself. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Lebanon, however. The 1980s and 1990s neoliberal injection into the Third World through subsidiary NGOs has sunk its teeth into a majority of the Middle Eastern and North African states, with relief and development organizations being especially revitalized and booming in the post-Arab spring MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.

In conclusion, the findings of this research highlight the significant impact of NGOs, particularly Daleel Madani, on the labor market and the need for a functioning National Employment Agency in Lebanon. The data reveals a mismatch between the profiles and backgrounds of jobseekers and the requirements of available jobs in various productive sectors, which has contributed to the high unemployment rates among university graduates. Organizations like Daleel Madani, while attempting to increase employment rates, inadvertently contribute to the neglect of key sectors such as agriculture, education, crafts, manual labor, and construction. Furthermore, the prevalence of NGOs in Lebanon has implications beyond the labor market. By shaping the livelihoods of a substantial portion of the workforce, these organizations become instruments of Western influence, undermining national sovereignty and promoting neoliberal agendas. This phenomenon is not unique to Lebanon, as the spread of neoliberalism through NGOs has affected numerous Middle Eastern and North African states, particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring. By reconnecting our analysis to the

initial theory, we can reaffirm that the existence of NGOs like Daleel Madani has indeed affected the need for a functioning National Employment Agency. This research underscores the importance of critically examining the role of NGOs in shaping the labor market and national policies, as well as their broader implications for sovereignty and power dynamics. It is crucial for Lebanon and other fellow MENA nations mired in socio-economic crises to develop comprehensive and locally informed solutions that address these challenges, ultimately cultivating a more inclusive and fair labor market for anyone striving to establish a livelihood in the nation they call home.

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