



# National Case Study

**LEBANON**

**Lebanese American University**  
Beirut, Lebanon



Researching  
Arab Mediterranean Youth:  
**Towards a New Social Contract**  
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This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 613174





## General Data

Country	<b>Lebanon</b>
Localizations (name)	<b>1</b>
Code of National Case	<b>NCS-LB-1</b>
Keywords	<b>Education, Labour, Urban, Rural</b>

## Abstract

These report summaries the main findings of the Lebanon ethnographic team. The report offers insights into the following clusters:

- Education: conflicting education and the effects of public and private education upon the opportunities of young people
- Employment: the relationship between education and employment opportunities
- Youth values and cultures: the desire to have fun and for spaces to be creative and imagine.

**SAHWA Project**  
**Lebanon: National Case Study**  
**Lebanese American University**

In accordance with the broader SAHWA objectives, the aim of the Lebanese research team is to think critically about what it means to be young in Lebanon today. An anthropological study of this kind can provide us with a unique lens through which to explore the political, economic and social dynamics that are informing, impacting and restricting the decisions that young people in Lebanon are able to make today—and particularly as they prepare for the future.

**Specific Thematic Research Question addressed by the Lebanon Team:**

**Youth Opportunities:** To what extent do education systems and access to employment contribute to empowering young people in Arab Mediterranean countries—or do they rather reinforce existing social exclusion patterns? If the latter is the case, what other institutions or education or labour market reforms (might) compensate for this effect?

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## **Introduction**

This report presents the findings of the LAU ethnographic team from their qualitative research conducted across Lebanon. Our main focus during fieldwork was especially concerned with the role of education in shaping young peoples' future opportunities. In the first sections, we provide an overview of our theoretical and methodological frameworks. We also take note of our ethical obligations during fieldwork, before introducing our fieldwork sites and some preliminary conclusions. We then go on to discuss our data. In the final section, we provide the main conclusions of our research.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

In our research, we took the concept of youth to be both a historically constructed social category and a relational concept (Durham, 2000). In taking such a stance, we were able to examine the underlying political, economic and social forces structuring and shaping the spaces in which those actors who are considered to belong to the youth category. We were therefore not only able to think further about the construction of the category of youth within Lebanon, but also started to explore the importance placed upon particular ideals of personhood. When using the term "personhood", we are referring to the processes and stages involved in the social development (and construction) of particular gendered subjectivities (Durham, 2000; Comaroffs, 2006). Issues of education and employment—a key focus for us—are thus potentially highly significant features of the processes of personhood, especially those aspects that associated during the social transformation of a young person into an adult (Katz, 2004). By examining the "social reproduction" of certain notions of personhood, we thus attempted to identify the types of education and work related practices and relations perpetuating certain patterns of social exclusion and/or those that are assisting in the empowerment of the young people of Lebanon.

A critical study of youth opportunities must look to the structures facilitating the reproduction of social inequalities. In light of the complexities characterising the contemporary Lebanese predicament that will be discussed later on in this report, it is apparent these structures of inequality at global, national and local levels often materialise through the relationship found to exist between education and labour relations. The historical dimensions of the inter-connectedness of global and more localised structures of

inequalities are especially notable in Lebanon in the legacy of privatised schools and universities (and most especially Beirut) that were established by European missionaries—a strategy of the *mission civilisatrice*. While private-run education institutions has become a profitable industry for entrepreneurs and religious organizations, the state run public schools with curriculums designed on the basis of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' French education systems continue to receive minimal attention in the moulding of particular social and economic classes in Lebanon.

### **Methodologies Considerations**

This national case report draws on the data collected from focus groups, life histories and participant-observation. Fieldwork was conducted between April and June 2015. Given that the allocated amount of time given to researchers to conduct participant-observation research is relatively short for the development of extensive ethnographic fieldwork, we have remained cautious in drawing conclusions from some of our observations. We have instead attempted to raise questions that could be addressed in future research. It should also be noted that during the focus groups, some participants knew each other. Previous research experience has continuously demonstrated that when looking to examine smaller localities such as urban neighbourhoods, rural villages and/or particular networks, people tend to have had previous encounters with one another. Instead of taking these already established relations as a disadvantage, we aim to use such knowledge as a means to further examine the socio-dynamics of a range of different people who might know each other, but have not necessarily had the opportunity to discuss together, questions of empowerment, education and work. Life histories offer intimate insights into how people perceive their “positionalities” within broader social contexts. Following the focus group, we invited one participant to more informal settings and started the process of documenting their life histories. Given that our intention is to focus on education, employability and empowerment, questions and prompts attempted to encourage the discussion towards such issues. Participant-observation was conducted regularly throughout the three-month period. Researchers followed some of the participants of the life histories and focus groups around in their daily life, occasionally joining them for a coffee or a sandwich at the local snack point.



When designing our methodological framework, we kept in mind the main objective of the SAHWA project which is to provide a comparative framework for mapping transition and transformation throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, one that can also support policy makers at national levels with the clear recommendations for the facilitation of sustainable social change. When we began our research, we observed that Lebanon was suffering from a political vacuum, most aptly reflected in the absence of a president. We re-articulate that these kinds of political instability (and insecurity) continue to have immense ramifications when exploring youth opportunities in Lebanon, but also add that we found these implications to become even more observable when we sought to refine our methodological framework. While we do not feel that we will be able to single-handedly solve this question of political sovereignty, we are aware of the particular methodological ramifications when studying opportunities and access to education and employment within the broader context of the Lebanese political predicament. Most especially, we became aware that when developing the techniques to obtain data relevant to our overall objective, there was the pressing question of who and which policy makers—ultimately, which government?

Focus Groups: Ein El Remmaneh, Ras Beirut, Joun and one with stakeholders

Life histories: Ein El Remmaneh and Joun

Case studies: Ein El Remmaneh and Joun

### **Ethical Considerations**

All researchers involved in the project are aware of the SAHWA ethical guidelines found in the SAHWA Ethnographic Fieldwork Handbook. Researchers ensured to engage in activities that will not bring harm to themselves or their research interlocutors. Researchers obtained permission from all those involved in the ethnographic study and respected all those who requested confidentiality and anonymity. To this end, researchers were aware that not all participants might be willing to become involved in the usage of different mediums of documentations—including audio and visual recording. Due to the collaborative and participatory dimensions of the SAHWA project, we worked with transparency and have not intentionally attempted to give any false impressions of the aims and objectives of the study. We will also give due credit to all those involved in obtaining and analysis of data.

### **Ethnographic Field Sites**

Due its political, economic and social centrality in both historical and contemporary Lebanon, Beirut has been taken as the main urban location. We decided to look at two contrasting socio-economic regions in the city. However due to the limited number of researchers available for ethnographic work, we decided to direct our ethnographic attention mostly to first area which is roughly situated in the district of Ein El Remmaneh. Some parts of the second area are roughly located within the region often referred to as Ras Beirut, but also extend to the Sanayeh District. Thus while we conducted a focus group, a life-history interview and participant-observation in Ein El Remmaneh, we were only able to carry out a focus group in Ras Beirut. The third site is situated in the Chouf District of Mount Lebanon. We believed that the Joun area of the Chouf offered some comparative insights into the rural dimensions of our research. Participant-observation, a life history interview and a focus group were all conducted in Joun. Prior to conducting fieldwork, we visited each region for a pilot study. We established contacts with a number of young people residing in each of these areas, making them aware of our intention to conduct fieldwork.

### **Ein El Remmaneh**

Ein El Remmaneh is a residential area that belongs to the Chiyah municipality of southwest Beirut. It borders at least two other municipalities: Hazmieh, Furn el Chebbak and Ghobery. The neighbourhood is in close proximity to Beirut's main highways. Ein El Remmaneh has become somewhat of a diverse and bustling neighbourhood. Due to its relatively lower rental and real estate prices, Ein El Remmaneh might initially be considered as a potentially attractive residential area for members of Beirut's working classes. There are approximately 10,000 residents living within the Chiyah community, and 3000 of those residents are in Ein El Remmaneh. Ein El Remmaneh is a predominantly Christian neighbourhood but there are also some Shi'a residents. There are also a small number of non-Lebanese migrant workers residing in the area who come from Syria, Egypt and Ethiopia. Similarly to a number of other neighbourhoods within greater Beirut, displaced victims of the war had dramatically increased the population of Ein El Remmaneh. Unlike nearby areas in Chiyah, where displaced persons were mostly Shi'a communities from the south of Lebanon who had fled Israeli bombardment and occupation, Ein El Remmaneh became the home for displaced Christian communities. During our research, it appeared that despite this relative diversity in

religion and ethnicities approximately three quarters of the neighbourhood's residences either consider themselves—or are considered by others—as “outsiders” who moved to Ein El Remmaneh within the last forty years—that is, since the start of the civil war (1975-1991) in Lebanon. Further research is required to fully examine the nuances of the distinction between insider and outsider across the generations. Discussions with our interlocutors indicate that unlike “outsiders”, those young residents perceived to be “locals” to Ein El Remmaneh are able to claim that both parents were also born in either Ein El Remmaneh or Beirut. Yet it is also important to point that this differentiation drawn between those considered to have originated in Ein El Remmaneh, and those who have come from elsewhere on account of the civil war, does not appear to have a great impact upon the friendships and relations forged amongst the young people of Ein El Remmaneh.

Opportunity has yet to arise for us to investigate in great detail the ways in which the arrival of many displaced persons into Ein El Remmaneh might have transformed shared sentiments of belonging and community and locality in the neighbourhood. It is however apparent that the civil war and influx of refugees into Ein El Remmaneh as well surrounding and nearby neighbourhoods facilitated the acceleration of social and economic transformation in the area. These changes are most especially noted in the way some residents of Ein El Remmaneh are considered to be “outsiders”, despite having been born and lived in the neighbourhood all their lives.

### **Joun**

The village of Joun is nestled into the hills of the Chouf region. The name Joun originates from the Assyrian word for “corner”. While the name does not necessarily imply a particular connection between the current residents and those who might have settled in the area during the Assyrian period, it is testament to the *longue durée* of the region. In relatively recent history, the area of Joun became the focus of Ottoman rural administration. Ottoman administrators were commissioned with developing the agriculture of the region, and Joun eventually became its own municipality. It is these particular political and rural legacies that have shaped Joun today. Joun continues to hold its municipal status and the landscape is one of olive groves and vineyards—similar to those planted over a hundred years ago. Yet despite of this seemingly idyllic and peaceful countryside where initially, it would appear that nothing might ever change, the landscape of Joun has a complex and dynamic history.

Indeed, observations that surfaced during our research in Joun suggested that the “silent” and tranquil landscape had as much to do with the village’s rural location as it did with the increasing migration of its young residents to the urban coastal regions. Many of our Joun participants were of course too young to remember the early period of the Lebanese civil war, both in city and in country. Yet some of our participants recalled the latter years of the war. Notably these negative memories of fear and uncertainty were often discussed in relation to other happier memories of home and family.

### **Preliminary Ethnographic Conclusions from Ein El Remmaneh and Joun**

Given that our period of ethnographic research was limited to three months, the conclusions we can draw are only preliminary. For deeper analysis, extensive and rigorous fieldwork is required and for a much longer duration.

Our initial conclusions highlight that residents of Ein El Remmaneh often articulated notions of identity by drawing distinctions between insider and outsider. These social distinctions were not necessarily concerned with drawing a divide between residents from other neighbourhoods in the Chiyah municipality. Instead, they appeared to have more significance with regard to the historical legacy of the civil war and the consequential differences in socio-economic class within the neighbourhood itself. Most notably, young people who could barely remember the civil war, or were not even born at the time, also utilized similar distinctions as their elders. This discourse of insider and outside, where those who moved to Ein El Remmaneh during or after the civil war, were often distinguished in terms of the type of building in which they lived, potentially sheds light upon the type of accelerated change to have occurred during the last three decades. This bought of rapid social change is perhaps most especially reflected in the construction of new apartments not only because of the increase in property prices around the neighbourhood, but also because of substantial increase in population.

On the one hand, and given that this increase in property price is relatively lower than in other neighbourhoods within close proximity to Beirut, Ein El Remmaneh continued to attract lower to mid-income families. On the other hand, those families considered as “originally” from Ein El Remmaneh were often from the lower-income strata. It is in this regard that the discourse of insider-outsider facilitated in the social reproduction of class differentiation. The sentimental importance for those originally from Ein El Remmaneh to

remain in the neighbourhood and close to their relatives often facilitated further tensions. That many young men we spoke with found apartments as unaffordable purchases and yet they felt it necessary in order to provide for their future spouses highlights that pressure many felt to fulfil social obligations. Similarly, young women often delayed marriage and family planning until much later.

Many of the young people we spoke with expressed a sense of boredom in that there was very little to aspire or look forward to. While many valued education and completed their education to university level, they also felt that there was little opportunity to achieve success in the fields that were of real interest. Within both the private and public sectors, schools and universities provided little space for the students to pursue their personal interests. Education in this respect was perceived as overly functional and orientated toward securing future employment rather than developing one's creativity. Many also saw the irony that despite completing degrees and occupational certificates, job opportunities were not substantially increased, if at all. Finally, the desire to leave Lebanon and emigrate abroad was not necessarily a desire that young people wanted to act out. Rather, narratives of emigration fill out these empty spaces of boredom.

Our preliminary findings suggest that while a number of young people from Joun are obliged to live along the urban coast, remaining connected to the village was of strong importance. The significance of this connection was entangled with kin sentimental and the desire for generational continuities in the relationship between land and family. Yet it is the civil war had ruptured this relationship of many families to the region. A number of families had moved to live along the coast in an attempt to flee from conflict but also in search for work. It is apparent that the civil war had negatively impacted Joun's agricultural economy and following the end of the conflict, few families returned to live in the village permanently. Instead, many continued to visit during weekends and holidays. At the same time, it appears that families from Joun also hoped to find ways to forge ties between their children and the region. Sending children during the teenage years to complete their final years of education was one such attempt. Indeed many young people spoke highly of their time attending school in and around Joun. Yet it is also of significance that it were often young men rather than women who were encouraged to establish a closer relationship with the Joun village. While these observations are only based upon three months of fieldwork, it is of significance that in terms of engaging with public spaces, young men spoke more than

the young women of enjoyment of hanging out in the village *saha*. That is not to say that the young men spoke more highly of Joun than the young women. In both cases, Joun had an important role in the making of collective memory. The preservations of a “natural” Joun landscape was in this respect an attempt to provide a sense of continuity despite of the precariousness of everyday life not only due to war but also in the lack of opportunities. Finding ways to preserve Joun’s natural beauty thus also required, more often then not, that young people sought study and work along the coast and in the city.

### **Conflicting Education: Between Private and Public Learning**

The history of regional conflict is interwoven into the fabric that makes up the country’s education systems. Social and economic inequalities emerge most especially through the fact that schools and universities are divided along public and private funding. Also notable is the long historical relationship between privately funded education institutes and religious organizations (Farha, 2012 & more broadly, Makdisi, 2000). There is thus strong significance that the education standards in private schools and universities across Lebanon are often not consistent with each other, tending to follow guidelines set outside of the country—and consequently students are often taught in a number of different languages and of the histories of other countries and regions. Indeed, there is even a lack of consensus upon history education and this is especially in public schools where Lebanese history ends in 1945 (Makdisi, 2006; Farha, 2012& Abu Assali, 2012).

It is common knowledge that Lebanese with dual citizenship can claim their second nationality and subsequently attend private schools offering non-Lebanese curriculum, such as the American High School system, the French *brivè*, or the International Baccalaureate. Evidently, in order to complete these programmes and also avoid the Lebanese *brivè*, dual citizens do not only require another nationality, but also the sufficient funds. To the best of our knowledge, none of the residents we spoke with held dual nationality but there was still an apparent preference for private schools that offered the Lebanese system as well as another curriculum. It is unclear as to whether this proclivity for private schools has contributed towards a possible trend of students completing elementary and even middle years of education at a private institution before moving on to their final years at a public school. Given the high cost of learning in Lebanon however, it is highly possible that such trends reflect saving strategies for families. Further and more detailed research is required.

In spite of preferences for private schools, our interlocutors spoke often of the need for a more unified education system in Lebanon. During formal and informal discussions, many interlocutors pointed out that the lack of cohesiveness in the education system contributed to further socio-economic inequalities in Lebanon. It is significant that when asked about the role of education, a number of interlocutors expressed the value of education in terms of progressing society. School was described as place where you were taught “discipline and manners” but that also “opens your eyes” to the future. One of our focus group discussants from Ein El Remmaneh said, “Essentially school teaches you research, discipline and how to behave”. There was also a distinction made between what one learnt at school in terms of the different subject to how schools can shape and cultivate an individual. Another participant from the same focus group expressed these thoughts:

“School is most important for socialization, cultivation/culture and formal education...School teaches you how to interact with your friends and other people in general, it teaches you respect, to understand authority and influence and the important of law from an early age. School is also about formal education, you need to learn as well, such as languages, science, accounting/math” (Focus Group from Ein El Remmaneh)

Our interlocutors considered that the differences in the way students were taught and “cultivated” in private and public schools was an important factor contributing toward socio-economic inequalities and curtailing equally opportunities for all young people. Notably, while some of our interlocutors also agreed that the disparities between state and private education institutes were socially limiting, they explained that until the systems changed, if they had the choice then they would prefer to attend private schools and universities. Nevertheless, during all our discussions there was unanimous agreement that Lebanon require a more unified and fair education system: “We should have one system-schooling where all regardless of their background and social class should go through that system”. Further disparities arose amongst the different kinds of private schools. When encouraged to elaborate upon some of these main social inconsistencies that came about due to the organization of the Lebanese education system, many discussed the role of language.

-“The next thing is the language and the standard of languages–We use “foreign” languages at the Lebanese university and Arabic is not always strong and remains weak. We only/mostly have schools that teach in English, French and Arabic.” (Nada: Female, Ein El Remmaneh)

-“Arabic—but not only Arabic...it depends on the subject for example, history is not always about Lebanon then it is in another language...so for example French history...” (A, Male: Ras Beirut)

-“English is a business language, emails works....and French has become “salonat” (conversational)...French is also now a “snobby” kind of language... “(Z, Female: Ras Beirut)

-“Yes, we are in the days of English...but Arabic could be if it were stronger we were to make it more valuable and important in our education.” (O, Male: Ras Beirut)

-“I was in Joun public school—It was a great school. We learnt French but it was an Arabic speaking school so while we had French classes and curriculum, it was all translated into Arabic. French was not a strong language in our school” (Z, Female: Joun)

Many of our interlocutors agreed that the language was a significant factor that contributed toward the reproduction of social inequalities and divisions. They pointed out that language was not the *reason* why there were differences, but rather reflected these divisions that limited their opportunities in the future. A 29-year-old woman participating the focus group from Ein El Remmeneh offered a detailed useful example from her personal experiences:

“I attended a Francophone school...When I went to university to learn “Education” (Pedagogy) but there was a lot in English and we didn’t learn a lot of English at school—only 2 hours a week. So there has to be the opportunity to learn languages that are the specialty of that university as well—so we can go to universities we want to as well. So a strong basic understanding of the languages...we have to choose universities that we learnt in the language...so we need to have the opportunity in the senior years of school—to enter or switch to schools that allows us to apply for the university that has the options we want. It doesn’t have to be in the early years, but later years....The system of school continues to university...” (Focus Group Ein El Remmaneh)

Our interlocutors considered that it was important for the opportunity to learn languages other than the usual English, French and Arabic. One participant expressed his desire to learn languages such as German or Spanish, or Italian, while another mentioned an interest in Chinese and Russian. Many believed that having other optional language courses was of importance because globalization. Notably, our participants embraced aspects of globalization such as multiculturalism and this was reflected in their desire to learn other languages—they wanted to be connected to the rest of the world. When prompted for further information about this desire to be connected, participants returned to the topic of education and spoke this time of the importance of knowledge, and most especially research. Some



spoke of the need for universities and research centres that were fairly accessible to all—and that would specialize in a range of difference disciplines, attracting people from around the world.

Significantly, while participants highlighted some of the ways that national political agendas shaped challenges in their daily education at state schools and universities, there was also discussion concerning the relationship between economic and political strategies. Private schools and universities were considered to have more up to date standards and perhaps less “authority” in comparison to public education institutions. Yet at the same time, all participants from all focus groups highlighted the business and profit-making dimensions of the private education sector.

-“Now the difference between private and public schools that we have here in Lebanon...the problem is a simple one: we have arrived at a stage where school is a trade and business...so for example a young person will have to pay 2000-3000 dollar for the year and then we have state schools” (J, Male: Ras Beirut)

-“The government is strategically neglecting state schools, while the leaders (politicians)... they have their own private schools... or shares, this is one of the reasons they don’t encourage state schools...it is difficult to find a private school where the owner of share-holder is not a politician or with a political agenda” (O, Male: Ras Beirut)

Many participants expressed the differences between the standards of public and private education as being mostly politically charged. They spoke of the need for a more holistic educational system that everyone in Lebanon could attend. There was in this regard a general consensus that the idea of public/state schools was not a bad one:

-“So school is really important for children on many levels: education, socially on many levels...constructing the personality. Public schools are there for families who cannot afford to educate their children and public schools are there for them. So (the idea) of public schools is to help in creating more equality in society—everyone gets a chance to go.” (Ch, Male: Ein El Remmaneh)

-“We should have one-system-schooling where all regardless of their background and social class should go through that system” (R, Female: Ein El Remmaneh)

The current education system was considered to reproduce social inequality, including religious differences as well contributing to the political and economic problems in the country:

-“I agree with Participant X, that the school system in Lebanon is divided, and even within the private sector, schools are divided...we should have one school for students to attend without religion and such to attend...and it’s not always about who pays for it” (M, Female: Ein El Remmaneh)

-“... with regards to university—here in Lebanon we have different classes and us middle classes don’t have like 100,000 \$ to invest into our education at a private university.” (H, Male: Joun)

-“... we also have a lot of religious schools (private and public)—such as the schools run by Catholics, by Monks, the Makassed (Islamic Philanthropic) School, these schools have a level of religion more than other schools including public schools” (C, Male: Ein El Remmaneh)

Many of our interlocutors had either completed their higher education or were currently university students. Similarly to the discussions about school, many spoke about higher education in terms of shaping and advancing oneself as person. In other words, higher education was more than just about specializing in a particular field. Participants mostly spoke of highly of their experiences at universities in connection to meeting people from other regions of Lebanon. The only advantage most of our interlocutors saw in their attendance at the public Lebanese University was the opportunity of meeting students who came from different regions and backgrounds. Many spoke of overcrowding in the lecture halls and they felt that the education they were receiving was out of date, or not connected to the real world.

“...anything I learnt at school had nothing to do with university, so I started from 0—but at the LU, there weren’t enough resources and so we sat, 10-20 at the computer for example, while in others, there might 4-5 in front of the computer. We just learnt theory and that was that.”

The few who attended private education systems did not complain about similar issues but felt that learning remained very insular—and at times fraught with sectarianism.

“You know...everyone goes to school and university but they come out with the same perspective and way of thinking and asking the same sort of questions...what is your religion...what neighbourhood/area are you from...I mean we don’t need to speak about these things!”

### Urban-Rural Differences

A recurrent theme that surfaced during our discussions about the transition from school to higher education and then onto working was that there was very little guidance available—in fact this was also an issue for young people we spoke to in Joun and Ras Beirut. Participants from Ein El Remmaneh wished there had been further advice about the types of careers they could pursue with their degrees. One focus group participant explained, “There aren’t guidelines/ or advice about what we can do with our degrees. Also (we need) to have the opportunity to change our degrees or to see what we can do with it.” For example, a degree major in sociology was pursued with great enthusiasm by one of our interlocutors, but upon graduation, it proved impossible to find a job in the discipline. He explained that in order to pursue further studies, he would most likely have to leave the country—an option that was beyond his economic means. Instead, he became a sports teacher at a local school. Many of the young people we spoke with had similar narratives. In the focus group, one of our participants summarised some of social implications of the lack of useful guidelines” Yet it was perhaps during the transition from school to upper education when young people began to observe and reflect upon the socio-economic differences between urban and rural settings. During our focus group in Joun, one of the young people provide a succinct comparison between the urban and rural contexts:

“First of all, there is the difference between village and city—we don’t have colleges or universities that are close to us. If we want to go to university then we have to go to the city. Now with regards to university—here in Lebanon we have different classes and us middle classes don’t have like 100,000 \$ to put invest into our education at a private university. We go instead to the state/public universities: the Lebanese university and what we specialise in is based upon what they have available...there is no respect by teachers on the students. There is a kind of authority from the teachers to the students—there are of course other issues. The standards are okay—average I guess.”

It was striking in this regard, that while a number of young men from Joun had attended their final years in a private school near Joun, many went onto study at Lebanon’s public university. Most of them were also based at Hadath campus, near Dahiyeh in Beirut. While the Hadath campus was relatively closer to Joun than other Lebanese campuses across the country, for those university students who continued to live on in Joun, the commute remained long and arduous. At times, the students were arrive at university only to find that classes had been cancelled:

“Lectures are not always happening...you know, those of us who come down from the village, it’s not easy during the winter days to get to university...the roads and the cars (minimal transport service), and then when we arrived there are is no lecture because the lecturer is not there—later or just doesn’t arrive. There are strikes...and the universities are closed”. (focus group)

While lecturers were often striking for more sustainable work conditions, politics amongst students appeared to have less to do with labour issues. Indeed, it was during their university years when many from Joun began to experience differences asserted through religious affiliations.

“These experiences are hard and continue to be so...I am now in my third year at university. So it is difficult and a lot of pressure especially because of the atmosphere...you know when we were in school, the atmosphere was calm and the atmosphere was...until the end no manifestations of religion...even if it was a school run my monks and it was a religious school. But there weren’t manifestations of religion. There weren’t differences between people and there weren’t tensions or conflicts over religion. We were in a place where there nothing called (religious) sectarianism. We didn’t know anything in relationship to this sort construction of making differences. The most kinds of problems we were those silly teenager problems. At university I began to experience things that were harder and experience how people (young people) can become tense with each other...so people from villages used to stay together and people from each religion used to come together...now of course this isn’t everyone. There are people who get to know others from different regions and different religions...different backgrounds and this is nice at university. So you know I have made friends from all the different regions in Lebanon and I have made connections to different places and have become friends so many different kinds of people who think like me...” (Joun focus group)

Notably, the young people we spoke with in all sites, were not content with the manifestation of religious differences at the Lebanese university and felt that a lot of these tensions were entangled with the other political activities in Lebanon such as patronage and corruption:

“But we also have problems with favouritism/nepotism and clientalism...and then there are the political parties... There are also now centres/organizations at the Lebanese university, religious ones, political parties...and then we have favouritism over religion, over political parties.” (Joun focus group)

Many of the young people from Joun that we spoke with expressed disillusionment with the system. Yet that is not to say that the young people of Joun were naïve about the reality of opportunities in Lebanon. Rather, they felt that up until graduating from school and entering into university, their lives had been somewhat protected from the reality of the Lebanese state's "regime":

"Now before the stage of university, I accepted that my life wasn't going to be easy going and straightforward. I going to live a life that is going to be impacted by negative circumstances...I live in a complex and difficult country with a (state) system that is very difficult and hard. So I knew these things but when I arrived at university I experienced/faced for the first time, the real face of this regime...system..." (Joun life history Hadi)

The reality of this regime did not only surface into the everyday in terms of religious discrimination and the domination of Lebanese party politics on university campus, but also in connection to what young people felt was the lack of standardization in education across Lebanon. In not being able to specialize in their desired disciplines, there were clear anxieties about the future. Many young people felt a lot of pressure to do well at university—even though there was little support to do so. At the same time, many were unsure as to where they preferred to reside: along the urban coast or up the mountains in Joun. Notably, this uncertainty was entangled with the feeling that they had very little control over their future and nor the kinds of decisions they could make in the present. Most of the young people we engaged with who were still studying at school or university expressed there are clear anxieties about future employment. These uncertainties have a lot to do with how they perceive their connection with Joun. While some expressed clear desires to return to Joun, they also saw that there were not many opportunities in rural areas for work. The lack of work opportunity in Joun was not only in terms of what they were studying at university but also in connection to broader issues that characterised Lebanon.

### **Wanting to have fun**

Recreation was an important theme that came up during conversations with our interlocutors. While there are a number of sports clubs, restaurants and shopping malls located in and around Ein El Remmaneh, many of the young people we spoke with felt that similarly in the way they weren't able to pursue the university studies they really wanted, there was also little opportunity to practice the hobbies that interested them. These hobbies

included music and language. Language continued to be an important to the focus group discussion and some of the participants explained that learning to speak Chinese, or Russian, Italian or Spanish was something that could be fun and not something that could be made as compulsory at schools or university.

“For every country...they have options in these different schools...they can choose different languages...and it could be the basics. In Lebanon learning a language has become obligatory and like going to military! We have to go to school from 8 until 2...3...come home and then further studies. We don't have much freedom to learn what we want. At least if we had options for languages, it would give us some freedom and opportunity to choose something!” (Ein El Remmaneh Focus Group)

The young people we spoke with explained that having the chance to learn a hobby such as a musical instrument or learn a language was about having fun but also about developing a potential opportunity in the future. In this respect, it was significant that a number of our interlocutors made a connection between what they saw as a narrow and somewhat insular standard of education in the country and the minimal opportunity to use one's creativity and imagination. During some of our discussions, young people asked why there weren't many (if any) established centres and academies for music or language? One interlocutor explained that it wasn't necessarily that she wanted to become an established musician or linguist, but that rather having such centres offered the opportunity for those who wanted to do so, while at the same time, allowing amateurs or just those interested in (for example) music, the chance to engage and just learn about their interests. Our interlocutor concluded by pointing out that such professional and amateur centres for music and the arts were found all around the world, so why not Lebanon? Despite this general sense that many hobbies were either non-existent in Lebanon- or simply beyond their economic means-a number of young people were pursuing different sorts of hobbies. One of men we spoke with was interested in automobiles and spent a lot of his spare time fixing and working on his cars. In her life history account, Maria spoke about a hiking group she joined:

“Well we go and eat out...we make picnics for ourselves and hang out! We used to go most especially to sit in natural surroundings...in nature. You know one sits the whole week at work in work and with a lot of pressure...in the city. You know, like for me, I don't originally come from any village I am from Beirut...so you know it is nice to get some change of pace of life for a while...” (Life history Maria)

One aspect of the appeal for Maria was that the group travelled out from the urban chaos Beirut to more tranquil rural settings. Notably other aspects had to do with having the chance to explore other regions and meeting people from different social backgrounds—most especially religious backgrounds.

“Yes, they would come in too and visit the churches and pay respects...and also I for example went areas in the south and east and we went into Muslim places of worship...and there are no problems. You we used to go the Baalbek and *Maqam Saidia Khoula*...and there are no issues. In my personal opinion it is important that people remain “flexible” (open-minded)...it is good for people to keep their hearts and minds open...” (Life history Maria)

Although the group size was fairly large, with approximately 80 hikers, Maria had managed to make some friends, keeping in contact mostly via Facebook. There were some members who came from Ein El Remmaneh and Maria also felt that she had managed to forge further connections at a local level. However similarly to many of the other young people we spoke with, Maria was not able to sustain her hiking interests on a regular basis. While the reason was partly due to the cost, a bigger part had to do with finding the time. Although Maria worked full time only during the week, she felt that by the time the weekend arrived she was too exhausted to travel around the country. She explained that it wasn't just about the stress of work but also the regular stresses of everyday life, which included the time-consuming daily onslaught of heavy traffic, the precarious hours of electricity and water shortage.

## **Emigration**

Mass emigration from Lebanon since at least the mid-nineteenth century has been shaped by national and international policies as much as they have by interpersonal networks extending across the globe (e.g. Owen, 1992; Hashimoto, 1992 Klich, 1992). Perhaps a most significant aspect of Lebanese emigration is the continuous (re)forging of social ties to their original villages and regions. However, in our “village” ethnography, a lot of the young people we met had not migrated out of Lebanon but from Joun to the urban coast. Significantly attending the final years at school up near the Joun village was not only about receiving a formal education but also an opportunity for students like Hadi to familiarise themselves with the region and with each other. More other than not, there was greater emphasis upon forging ties with others from the region:

“It was the period of examinations and it is a very difficult year for people. I tried really hard at the school...It wasn’t bad or good...We got by school but we enjoyed the system that we had there. I got to know some friends and there were many people who were nice...so this was nice for the adolescent years. And we used play and hang out together. These were nice experiences.” (Joun Life history Hadi)

These “nice experiences” were the good memories that many of the young people spoke of when they looked back to their rural education. Notably, it was not only the young men who spoke fondly of their high school experiences in the Joun region. Young women who also attend school in Joun spoke highly of their education. Significantly however, most of the young women had attended the public school in Joun, either returning to live with their grandparents or taking the long commute from the coast to the mountain. However, in both instances of school education, public and private, many felt that there was little support and advice to prepare them for university and work. It was as if, once finishing school in rural Lebanon, the young people were expected to move or return to the urban coast in order to attend university and/or find work.

Most of the young people we engaged with from Joun were still studying at school or university. As expressed in the earlier section, there are clear anxieties about future employment. These uncertainties have a lot to do with how they perceive their connection with Joun. While some expressed clear desires to return to Joun, they also saw that there were not many opportunities in rural areas for work. The lack of work opportunity in Joun was not only in terms of what they were studying at university but also in connection to broader issues that characterised Lebanon:

“If you want to talk about the job market in Lebanon, then we are laughing at each other. The job market in Lebanon is weak. The main problem is guidelines and directions—for example I went into obtain a degree in laboratory—I didn’t know that there was a medical lab and science lab—and that there are actually 3 specialities in laboratory. But in the Lebanese University, we only have one type of speciality” (focus group).

At the same time, it was significant that despite of the rural settings, many of the young people did not contemplate specialising in agricultural work, including agricultural engineering. In this regard, Joun and its rural economy did not initially appear to have any strong importance to the young people—sentimental or otherwise. It is of significance that the



‘beauty’ of Joun as belonging to part of a distinctive landscape of nature was done so in contrast to the rest of Lebanon’s overly urbanised sprawl:

“Ok, well Lebanon has natural beauty and most of it is gone...this needs to be preserved...the natural products...the earth. This really important. Personally, pine nuts are really important for me...from childhood, I remember when I used to go with my family to the pine forest and even when I see pine nuts, it brings back memories...With regards to society, nature is really important...it has an important role in society...” (Joun life history Hadi)

Young people saw that Joun had great value especially because of its natural beauty. Notably many expressed the importance of finding work outside of Joun so to prevent its urbanisation. Urbanization was seen as a negative process that would also ‘corrupt’ Joun as an idyllic landscape. Yet while young people saw themselves finding work outside of Joun, they were not optimistic about the job market. Many considered the job market to be based upon favouritism and “wasta”, with little very low salaries. One young lady who was reading for a French literature degree at the Lebanese university expressed her desire to go onto to specialise as a translator.

### **State, Gender and Emigration**

Frustrated feelings experienced about the experiences of daily life were often expressed in all sites connection to a negative perception of the state. The general lack of basic services such as electricity and water were often blamed on the state inertia. Significantly there was little optimism about the future of the current state in Lebanon. Some of the young people we spoke felt that despite of many protests about power black outs and water shortage that was due to lack of infrastructure—currently no president—that there was little hope the government would ever change. A number of young people spoke about how state politics manifested into the everyday through the education system and in the work place. We were told that at universities—both public and private—lecturers, or even departments might have affiliations with particular political parties who also held office in the state. Most of the times, these political connections were also sectarian. Similarly at work, the young people we spoke with faced discrimination or favouritism and this was also dependent on their background. The ways in which state corruption and the overall lack of transparency materialised into the everyday prompted some of our interlocutors to question the democratic nature of the country. Below is an excerpt from Maria’s life history:

“First of all...well they say that we have a democratic country but in my opinion this isn’t democracy...there are still inequalities and differences...women still don’t have all their rights...women are working to help men but there isn’t a word of support to help women in the house and to look after the children I want my children to be free to decide what they want...in everything...on what they study where they want to go with it...” (Life history Maria)

Significantly for her and other young people, these issues of gender and access to the same rights were often connected to perceptions of obligation that were also quite tense and conflicting. On the one hand, some of the young women spoke, like Maria, of the importance of equal opportunities between men and women. While on the other hand, it was significant that the young women and men that we spoke with also acknowledged that there were many challenges faced by men to provide for their wives. The social pressure to buy a house and be the sole earner was mentioned by many of our participants. Some explained that young men often worked three-four different jobs. Notably the kinds of jobs were also discussed and there was a degree of shame expressed in terms of working in occupations that were often associated with migrant workers who came from Syria and beyond. In this regard, many young men were quite choosy about the kinds of jobs that they were willing to do. At the same time, many of our participants believed that there was little opportunity to pursue their job interests in Lebanon, and this was an incentive to considering the options abroad.

In some ways, the desire to leave was quite different to taking action to leave. Although participants expressed their desire to leave to countries in Europe and North America, when prompted for further information about their plans to emigrate, many had given much thought about the practicalities. Further research is required to explore in some depth the role of ‘imagining emigration’ had in everyday youth perceptions of their future. However, initial discussion with our participants indicates that the desire to leave was entangled with the sense of obligation to fulfil particular gendered expectations. In other words, expressing the desire to leave to live abroad was about potentially becoming free of these obligations. In practice however, many could not–nor did they want–to leave because of their sentimental responsibility to family. One participant, who considered herself as originally from Ein El Remmaneh explained that she would never give up her citizenship, and even if she did find a way to leave Lebanon, she would always return to settle in her neighbourhood, next to her family and friends.

### **Main Conclusions that can be drawn to a national level**

All of our interlocutors were either born after the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991) or were born in the last few years but it came to an end. Yet the civil war between 1975-1991 has clearly impacted their lives. The accelerated transformation of both urban and rural areas during that period of war continues to influence political influence and as well as access to economic resources. In the case of many of the young people from Ein El Remmaneh who described themselves as originating from the region often had more to do with their families living in the neighbourhood before the war, than being registered to the Chiyah municipality. Yet it is significant that as Ein El Remmaneh undergoes further rapid transformation due to real-estate development, many of the “older”/ “insider” residents are unable to afford to invest in the new sky-rises. In some ways, the narratives of these “insider” young people of Ein El Remmaneh highlight experiences of dislocation and liberation, spectacle and participant, pluralism and fracture” Larkin discusses in his work on memory and conflict amongst the post-war generations of Lebanon (2010). The on-going instability of the country due to civil wars and including the Israeli war in 2006—of which many young people can remember—suggestive of how an “anticipation of violence” shapes daily life (Hermez, 2012).

Indeed, similar experiences can be found amongst the narratives of the young people from rural Joun. Civil war was one of the main catalysts behind the move—and even displacement—of many of their parents’ during the 1980s and 1990s. Significantly it wasn’t just conflict but also limited employment opportunities. However narratives from rural Joun reflect broader rural trends of migration to the urbanised coastal areas that began even before the civil war that began during the 1970s (e.g. Gilsenan). These migrations from the rural to the urban highlight that the effects of war are not the only factors contributing to the demographic changes in villages such as Joun. The marginalization of rural Lebanon clearly has a much longer history than of the civil war (ibi). It is apparent that there has been limited focus and attention to policies at national and regional levels aimed at sustainable development in rural areas.

Our young people in both rural and urban contexts were also aware that economic precariousness they were to face in terms of future job opportunities was very much connected to political instability in the country. There was a clear disconnection to current

political status-quo in the country. Politicians were not representing the issues the young people felt was pertinent. Some of these issues were related to basic infrastructure such as electricity and water. Other concerns were explicitly linked to a sense of not having any control over the future. The possibility of fulfilling social obligations such as young men owning—and even renting—a home before becoming eligible husbands were not high. Similarly for young women, where many relayed mix sentiments concerning work. Many felt a sense of empowerment about entering into the labour force but at the same time expressed a desire for their future partners to support them—especially when they planned to have children. In both cases, among men and women, visions of the future were tainted by what many perceived as corrupt system. This corrupt system was facilitated by the state and manifested in a number of ways.

It was especially significant in this respect that young people from different backgrounds and regions across Lebanon demonstrate a shared understanding of the kinds of role education should have in society as a whole. Education was about creating opportunities, as it was also considered as an opportunity in itself. To learn how to become an enlightened or educated person was perceived to be as something invaluable not just in terms of creating better job opportunities but also in connection to facilitating a process of citizenship. All participants criticised the current condition of the Lebanese education system as well as the available job opportunities. A number of participants felt that they were either pursuing a career that was different to what they had originally studied or were unable to major in their first choice. The main reasons for little opportunity to follow their aspirations were explained in connection to the lack of options and degrees available in Lebanon as a whole, the high economic cost and the ways in which nepotism and favouritism shaped relations at every level of society.

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Researching  
Arab Mediterranean Youth:  
**Towards a New Social Contract**  
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This project has received funding from the European Union's  
Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological  
development and demonstration under grant agreement no 613174.

The SAHWA Project ("Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract") is a FP-7 interdisciplinary cooperative research project led by the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and funded by the European Commission. It brings together fifteen partners from Europe and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries to research youth prospects and perspectives in a context of multiple social, economic and political transitions in five Arab countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon). The project expands over 2014-2016 and has a total budget of €3.1 million. The thematic axes around which the project will revolve are education, employment and social inclusion, political mobilisation and participation, culture and values, international migration and mobility, gender, comparative experiences in other transition contexts and public policies and international cooperation.

