

Government policies restricted expenditures to building infrastructure such as communications networks, trade routes, ports, airports, and warehouses. As both Atif Kubursi and Charif noted, the government's bias towards the development of the trade and services sector, centred in Beirut, led to the de facto neglect of traditional subsistence agriculture and sharecropping. Small rural farmers became bankrupt as cash-crop agriculture -- based on more modern techniques, and owned and managed by urban dwellers -- expanded and Lebanon began increasingly to export its agricultural goods. This transformation of the rural economy, in combination with the lack of alternative employment and the underdeveloped social and physical infrastructure in the regions, caused the relocation of thousands of sharecroppers and farming families to the urban slums around Beirut (the "Belt of Misery") in the 1960s and 1970s: "By 1975, more than 40 percent of the Lebanese rural population had left the countryside."⁹ Sbaiti observed that Beirut's periphery became a festering ground of discontent, with residents prime candidates for militia recruitment once hostilities broke out.

Charif considered the concentration of life in Beirut one of the major factors leading to the eruption of war in 1975: "Some analysts attribute the devastating destruction of Beirut, to some extent at least, to the revolt of the periphery against the centre, and to the revenge of the displaced rural population against their deep misery in Beirut and against their earlier agony and neglect in their original towns and villages." Kubursi stressed that Lebanon's bias in favour of trade and services contributed to both inequitable distribution of income and rising unemployment. Others also noted the economy's failure to provide employment opportunities for Lebanon's growing number of well-educated youth.

⁸(...continued)

Lebanon' reflected this neglect. The 'annexed provinces' never existed except through their intermittent and transient relations with the history of the Mountain."

⁹ This process of internal migration to the centre escalated during the 1970s, as Israeli bombardments in the south caused villagers to flee to the "safety" of Beirut.