

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LEBANESE  
POLITICAL GROUPS

by

Cynthia Nassif  
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## **DEDICATION**

This is dedicated to my mom who gave me all her support and time, my loving husband and soulmate, and our beautiful family in the US and in Lebanon. It is also dedicated to a dear friend who has left us.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Professor Rothbart, my chair, who has guided me throughout my dissertation. With his wisdom, kindness, and support I was able to fulfill my dissertation requirements amidst a global pandemic and an economic meltdown in Lebanon, my home country. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Korostelina and Dr. Fuertes, for their invaluable feedback. In these challenging times, I want to thank my loving husband, Fadi Rajeh, for his unconditional love, constant support, and for believing in me no matter what the challenges were as I paved my way through the PhD program. My daughter Julia also brought so much love and fun. She made the journey worthwhile. A wholehearted thanks also goes to my friends and colleagues who have shown great patience and support as I worked throughout the past 5 years. Most importantly, I thank the Lebanese people who stood by me and went out of their way to help me collect my data days after the Beirut blast of 4 August 2020; all while struggling themselves to make sense of the socio-economic, security, and political challenges back home. Without their support and trust, I could not have collected the data that has resulted in the following dissertation research.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Amal Movement .....	Amal
Armenian Revolutionary Federation.....	Tashnag
Free Patriotic Movement.....	FPM
Future Movement.....	FM
Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant .....	ISIS or IS
Kataeb Party .....	Kataeb
Lebanese Forces.....	LF
Marada Movement.....	Marada
Palestinian Liberation Organization .....	PLO
Progressive Socialist Party.....	PSP
Syrian Social Nationalist Party .....	SSNP
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East .....	UNRWA
United Nations Security Council .....	UNSC
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees .....	UNHCR
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene .....	WASH

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LEBANESE POLITICAL GROUPS**

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George Mason University, 2021

Dissertation Director: Dr. Daniel Rothbart

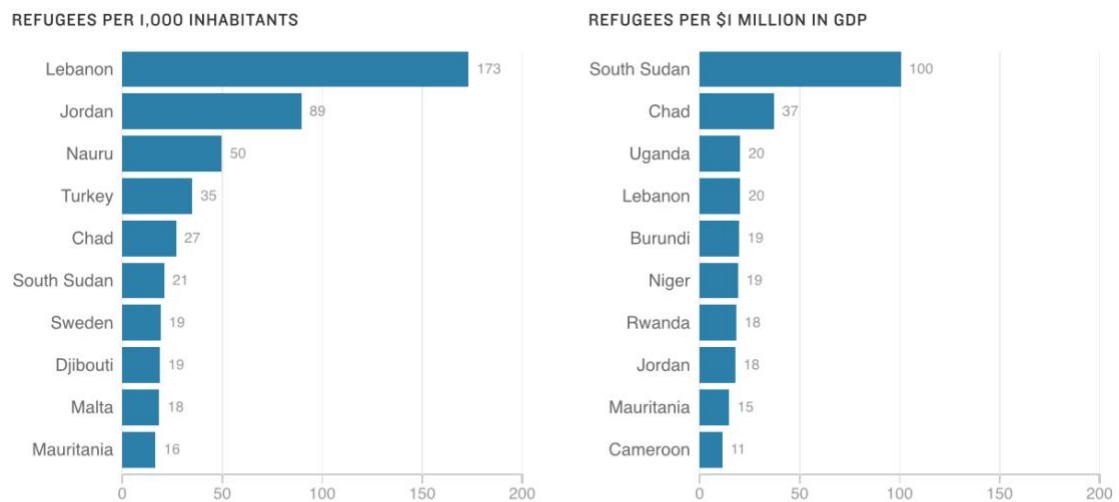
With the large influx of refugees into Lebanon, since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, fear of changes in demographics are putting pressures on an already fragile government infrastructure and an unreliable system of governance, which in turn, impacts the sensitive religious and political balance in the country. This research aims to look beyond the general fear of Syrian refugees radicalizing and into the perspective of different Lebanese political groups towards them with respect to categories of identity and difference. It will answer the following research question: What is the general understanding of the Syrian Refugee crisis, regarding the categories of identity and difference, from the perspective of Lebanese political groups? Looking into social identity, positioning, the system of axiology, threat narratives, and other dilemmas; the research will reveal the tension between various perspectives towards the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. Along with background research, interviews with key political party

groups' spokespersons will be conducted. In addition, political parties' constituents will participate in a questionnaire on the subject matter. Thematic analysis will then be used as a constructionist method to look into clusters/themes that can highlight patterns or trends to engage with peoples' experiences, understanding, representation, and construction of meaning to provide a rich account of the data collected. Therefore, my research aims to contribute to the literature on refugee-host dynamics and to inform policy by giving space for political leaders and their electorates to share their concerns, needs, strategies, and understanding of the crisis. This will help foster recommendations to address the subject matter.

## **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION**

The plight of refugees around the world has weighed down on the international community's systems and structures in place that it seems more of a threat than a human concern to support their plight. Recently, the world has faced one of the largest exoduses in history since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in March 2011 (Fakih & Ibrahim, 2016). It has been proven that violence due to war encourages more displacement and forced migration than natural disasters and other related factors (Moore & Shellman, 2004). Consequently, it has been imposing costs on national and international economies (Moore & Shellman, 2004). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017), global trends show that there are 68.5 million persons forcibly displaced. Of those, 25.4 million are refugees, 19.9 million are under UNHCR's mandate, 5.4 million are under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) mandate, 40 million are internally displaced, and 3.1 million are asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2017). Of those refugees, 51% are children under 18 compared to a global total of 31%. Noticeably, refugees usually flee to neighboring countries for safety and security. Consequently, the crisis grows in developing countries hosting 89% of refugees and 99% of displaced persons (UNHCR, 2016a). The following graphs display the number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants and

those per \$1 million in GDP showcasing the struggle and human suffering for refugees and host communities alike.



**Notes**

The graphic does not include data for Palestinian refugees, who for historical reasons are under the jurisdiction of UNRWA.

Source: *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Mid-Year Trends 2016*

Credit: Katie Park/NPR

## Figure 1

### *Refugees per 1,000 Inhabitants*

Note: Adapted from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by UNHCR 2016, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html> Copyright 2021 by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.



Therefore, host communities, many of which are struggling themselves, are stretching their resources as they try to pursue development goals and accommodate the demands in services and infrastructure that come with the influx of refugees to their countries. The following proposal will define key terms, highlight the challenges of hosting refugees in staggering numbers, illustrate the Lebanese case study, and address it through a theoretical framework for further research. This study aims to examine the Syrian Refugee Crisis from the perspective of Lebanese political groups.

### **Framing the Issue**

It is key to understand notions of identity and difference regarding the perspective of Lebanese political groups which is a reflection of Lebanon's complex system of governance and the impact it has had on the response to the Syrian refugee Crisis. In that regard, Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been mostly fragmented, a projection of its political divide over the crisis, but also a representation of institutions incapable of efficiently addressing the subject matter. This is the case because Lebanon's governance has never been centralized in robust institutions through which power is diffused. It has always been a power sharing agreement between Christians and Muslims that laid out the different power dynamics in the country. Traditionally, constitutional power is shared between the Lebanese President who is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister who is a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the parliament who is a Shia Muslim. Public sector jobs also follow a confessional quota. In the 1930s, Michel Chiha, a renowned political thinker, considered this national pact between different religious communities as a "necessary weakness" to govern Lebanon and its different confessional

parties (Fregonese, 2012). Multiple political parties represent different Lebanese sectarian communities.

In many political systems of the world, there is a clear line between state and non-state actors and between formal governance and informal participation by non-governmental governance. This is not the case in Lebanon (Fregonese, 2012). The boundaries are blurred and can also be viewed as the working structure of the Lebanese government. Therefore, formal governance through government institutions is a back drop to the informal governance of different sectarian communities in their respective areas of influence. The model of governance is thus hybrid and encompasses those who are visually in charge and those stakeholders pulling the strings within their own communities. According to Stel and Borgh (2017), hybrid forms of governance represent states who have no one reference point for governing their country which is the case of the confessional system in Lebanon. Though it is not the subject of this research to assess this hybrid model, I do assume that this model has contributed to the lack of response or mismanagement of the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

Historically, “complementary governance” (Idler & Forest, 2015) has shaped Lebanese politics and interactions between state and non-state actors. Political officials and government leaders also play the role of “Zuama” or communal leaders in their local communities. They act as the intermediary between the government and its citizens; each in their relevant sphere of influence (Fakhoury, 2020). Those are usually also their respective sect-based communities. Political parties have thus always been the nexus between the government and the Lebanese local communities (Fregonese, 2012). It is key

to note that 15 years after the end of the 1975 civil war, all political parties demilitarized except for Shia Hezbollah, who was endorsed to carry arms and to fight Israeli occupation in Lebanon. Today, the issue of Hezbollah's weapons is contentious, and is more the case because of Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war as they fight in support of the Assad regime. Hence, political parties in Lebanon act in different capacities. At the government level and in legislation, they represent their constituencies. On the community level, they are informal providers of goods and services including security, welfare, and patronage through favoritism to the people of their own sect and in their own communities (Stel & Borgh, 2017).

No sole state or non-state actor has absolute political power in Lebanon. The government by itself does not have the final say or a decisive role. Political groups encompassing those elected officials, who ran for elections with the support of traditional political parties, and those affiliated to the political parties they represent have the power to address, or not to address, the crisis. Political groups may seem homogeneous to the outside observer, but in reality they are heterogeneous with some in official government positions and others who are influential stakeholders in their local communities. Therefore, political parties and their constituencies are key stakeholders in the refugee-host dynamics. Both, the formal and informal system of governance, shapes the legitimacy of Lebanon's governance and its response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

Looking into its internal divisions and power dynamics between the system of governance and the response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, the Lebanese government seems to draw on such divisions to consolidate its "politics of refugee precarity"

(Fakhoury, 2020, p. 2). Those “divisions have served the host state’s restrictive refugee practices, complicated agreement on principles governing repatriation, and impacted refugees’ attitudes towards return” in addition to the government who seems to be “evading commitments on return in safety and dignity” in regards to Syrian refugees or displaced (Fakhoury, 2020, p. 2,3). They have also created the political terrain for different political factions to wrestle over who gets the final say in governance (Dahl, 2006) and this includes the uncertainty that has developed over the management of the Syrian Refugees and their respective host communities in Lebanon. Most of Lebanon’s response has been ad-hoc rules and regulations with the exception of the latest policy on return in 2019 which only got preliminary approval. Ad-hoc refugee policies are interpreted as a “performative act” (Estella Carpi & Pinar Şenoğuz, 2019, p. 83) and a deliberate political strategy to purposely choose indifference as a policy (Norman, 2019) or rely on informality to keep status quo or avoid any pressure for reform on the host-refugee front to sustain and further develop the system contributing to the politics of precarity (Baban et al., 2017, p. 42). This is in addition to using the refugee card as a political tool to privilege certain political agendas at the expense of others or to increase visibility of specific issues such as the issue of refugees in order to compensate for lack of performance on other issues of concerns to Lebanese citizens. Hence, the issue of Syrian refugees becomes politicized and highly polarizing.

Since 2011, Syrian civilians have crossed the borders into Lebanon, seeking refuge from war and better living conditions. The idea of a hospitable Lebanon has laid between generosity and support towards Syrian newcomers, mostly because of family

ties, and the need to respond to such a wide scale crisis where host communities feel the needs to reclaim their home and maintain social order (Estella Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019). Understandably, tensions build up between those who host and those hosted as both groups struggle to maintain decent living conditions. This is why humanitarian programs are currently addressing multi-ethnic areas populated by Syrians, Palestinians, and Lebanese (Estella Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019). The hospitality rhetoric around the Lebanese government and host communities has been used as a means to prevent or manage any escalation of conflict between those seeking refuge and host communities (Estella Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019). The labeling of hosts as generous also implies that local people with a different point of view on hosting can be labelled as “unwelcoming” and “greedy” (Estella Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019). The humanitarian perspective, in the case of the Syrian Refugee crisis, has constructed the image of Syrians as humanitarian victims deserving of this generosity rather than victims of human rights abuses (E. Carpi, 2015). This is a strategy to keep the money flowing in the quest to support them for the longest time possible. Still, anecdotes from host communities highlight the fact that international funding has not promoted local solidarity. For instance, in Akkar, northern Lebanon, “solidarity is historically entangled with local hostility against the Syrian government and army, as well as with labour competition prior to the presence of international humanitarian agencies”(Estella Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019). In this setting, hospitality remains at the mercy of material wealth and international donor regulations and their equivocal politics (Estella Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019).

Lebanon's response to the Syrian crisis has always been defined by its institutional ambiguity (Nassar & Stel, 2019). Decentralized and ad hoc regulations have helped the Lebanese government to sustain their pattern of refugee precarity when it comes to governance. Political parties and local leaders have taken the role of community proprietors in terms of providing services in host communities and regulating refugee related norms (Sayigh, 2001; Stel & Borgh, 2017). Those services in host communities shape the client- patron relationship between political parties and their constituents. Those parties constituting the essence of governing powers in Lebanese institutions have worked to stay in power while solely managing their sect and their needs. In terms of regulating refugee norms, a good example is that of the Palestinian refugees. When it came to Palestinian refugees, politicians and heads of political parties, have used them as a bargaining chip to strengthen their position with their base internally and alliances locally and regionally. They would not permit their naturalization under the pretext that this would hinder "their right of return" (Sayigh, 2001). In the case of Syrian refugees, polarization of different political parties towards the Assad regime was reflected in their support for certain strategies or others towards addressing the Syrian refugee crisis. In turn, informal and incoherent strategies to address the refugee crisis have also positioned Lebanon as a transit country and reiterated the narrative of Lebanon as a no-asylum country (Doraï & Clochard, 2006). It is therefore key to look into the general understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis from the perspective of political groups who are able to influence such a response. Looking into categories of identity of difference, we can look into layers of identity characterizations that have shaped the response of

political parties in government or opposition, but also delve deeper into personal experiences of host community members that are not necessarily in a position of authority, but have elected those in charge. Their understanding can help add a layer of complexity to my analysis as I seek to understand the different categories of identity and difference from the perspective of Lebanese political groups.

### **Research Question**

This brings us to the main question this dissertation will seek to answer: What is the general understanding of the Syrian Refugee crisis, regarding categories of identity and difference, from the perspective of Lebanese political groups? For the purpose of this study, political groups will be defined as members of the electorate that would vote for a particular political party during Lebanese parliamentary elections regardless of whether they carry partisan memberships. Understanding will entail their general understanding of the crisis with respect to categories of identity and difference as referred to in the theoretical framework of this proposal. In addition to the identity of those refugees/their characterization, the reasons they came to Lebanon, whether they differ from other refugee groups, and how political groups are framing the crisis and positioning themselves to create ingroup and outgroup boundaries. Thus, shaping identity salience and impacting socio-economic and political life.

The current literature on the state of refugee crises in general focuses on competition over resources and the security dilemmas as a consequence of refugees' influx to host countries. It is less concerned with the tension between memory, history, and rising emotions of injustices among Lebanese political groups positioning themselves

at different proximities from the Syrian refugee crisis. The research thus explored throughout this dissertation aims to highlight, through empirical research, the historical grievances and political aspirations of main Lebanese political groups that are influenced by their perspective of the Syrian crisis spill-over and the refugee crisis in Lebanon. The research may bring about the link between the Palestine refugee experience and the Syrian refugee experience, the difference in the memorialization of the Palestinian refugee experience between different Lebanese political groups and its direct or indirect link to their perspective on Syrian refugees, and the impact of the Syrian occupation on different political groups' understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis.

In brief, this research will contribute to the literature by examining different tacit positions and in some cases will also challenge them, it will highlight the refugee experience in Lebanon, and bring about the historical traumas and grievances that are shaping threat narratives in relation to the Syrian crisis today in Lebanon.

The purpose of this study is to look beyond the general public fear of refugees radicalizing and focusing more on why and how fear of refugees (specifically Syrians) has influenced the perspective of political groups in Lebanon and consequently contributed to their political acts and agendas. Therefore, the purpose is to examine the general understanding of Lebanese political groups when it comes to the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011. This is key since it influences the delicate political and sectarian balance in the country where a national unity and a common vision within a multi-confessional system is necessary to address rising tensions and extremism. Rising sentiments of resentment of one group or another may create a wider gap in the “us vs



them” dilemma increasing the rift between different sect-based/political identities and thus negatively impacting government functioning amidst the Syrian crisis and the regional turmoil. Discrimination or repression of any constituent will create a constant deadlock and induce mass population resentment further fracturing the country’s fragile political system and civil life. In addition, this research is also key to sustain peacebuilding efforts as different stakeholders in the Lebanon are working on peacefully managing the relationship between refugees and host communities amidst rising tensions and a circulating fearful narrative of a potential civil war outbreak.

The following study will examine the general understanding of Lebanese political groups towards the Syrian refugee crisis with respect to categories of identity and difference. It will not discuss the Syrian refugees’ perspective towards Lebanese, the resiliency of the Syrian refugees, and the detailed economic impact of the crisis on the livelihoods of Syrian refugees and the Lebanese economy.

### **Significance to the field of Conflict Transformation**

The Lebanese case mirrors various layers of complexity. Though the framing of the subject matter may seem political, the analysis itself will delve into categories of identity and difference that has shaped our migration policy or the lack thereof. It will help further our understanding of victimization in relation to systemic performative acts positioning political parties in government/opposition and their constituents; each at different proximities of the Syrian refugee Crisis. The electorates’ perspective will be key to our understanding of political groups as they are often disregarded as viewpoints that may lack knowledge to shape their perspective, lack education to shape their

understanding of the current socio-political and economic burdens in relation to the crisis, and lacking political expertise to push political agendas or shape policy in realm of migration and displacement.

This research will look into different identity categorizations of the host community towards Syrian refugees and demonstrate how those impact peoples' understanding of the crisis and their behavior towards refugees. It attempts to highlight fear as a tool of manipulation by different political parties towards their constituents and the formation of structural deadlocks impeding political processes and resolutions to feed on the precarity of refugee crisis management in Lebanon. This research will look into threat narratives, systems of axiology, and positioning of different groups in the us-versus-them dilemma. By looking into those layers of complexities, we can contribute to our understanding of structural intolerance, electorates' own experiences with trauma and victimhood, and the country's historic layers of tragedy. All of which create this system of axiology impeding trauma healing and feeding on othering and scapegoating.

This research will bring to the forefront the perspectives of host communities and the complexities of the Lebanese case. Unlike other host communities struggling with the presence of Syrian refugees in their country, the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon is unique as it is filtered through historical grievances and sectarian government institutions and structures. Though these sectarian identities have long created tension and wars between Lebanese citizens themselves, in the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, those boundaries are surpassed and the Lebanese people are today all together asking for the

Syrian refugees to leave Lebanese territories for reasons further discussed throughout the dissertation.

As an interdisciplinary subject, this research will help highlight different avenues of collaboration between practitioners, academics, and key stakeholders in the field of conflict transformation on the subject matter. Through the framework of “Refugee Precarity and Feedback Loop”, in Chapter 8, thematic areas of concerns will be highlighted and may thus become entry points for peacebuilders and practitioners seeking to address the understanding of political groups to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon which is a key contributor impacting today’s national policies and practices towards refugees or temporary displaced persons. Those interventions can help transcend and transform conflict for a more peaceful and sustainable solution to the crisis.

### **Personal Reflection**

I grew up in the aftermath of the 1975 Lebanese civil war, learning from elders about bloody sectarian strife that stood in sharp contrast to my safe life on the outskirts of Beirut. As a young girl, I lived in a comfortable household and went to a Catholic school ran by Maronite nuns and priests. Catechism was part of our academic curriculum and all my friends at school were from various Christian denominations. There was this particular friend at school, whom we all knew, had a Muslim father and a Christian mother. We were not introduced to other religions. My parents never really told me that “other” religions are different than us, but it always seemed that “other” people existed and lived on the other side of the country despite the fact they were rarely seen. Under these conditions, I felt happy within their own confessional realms.

My parents, children of the civil war, still used the terms East and West Beirut in reference to the territorial divide between Christians and Muslims even though the physical war itself has ended in 1990. It was not until I got into college that I had met Muslim colleagues that would then become lifetime friends. This rift between us and them always bothered me. As a younger person I never understood it. My friends seemed to be much more similar to me, my aspirations, and my values than I ever knew. The conversations that we would engage in over the next few years on religion, politics, and leadership in the country would then shape our friendships and our respective future in the field of politics and conflict resolution. It is also where I met my lifetime partner and husband, raised by Druze parents, who helped further my understanding on the Druze religion, its culture, and world view. His detailed understanding and knowledge in scriptures added value to the conversations we used to have in college. All of those experiences helped shape my perspective on the other and most importantly better understand myself as I started moving out of my comfort zone and meeting locals from different communities.

During one of my early professional experiences, an assignment to train teenagers on leadership and community development had me traveling in an armored vehicle to a bullet-strewn neighborhood in North Lebanon and showed me the stark inequities that exist in my country. It was hard to believe I was merely one hour away from my home. Not only I was being introduced to Lebanese host communities, but also refugees and displaced persons who had their own grievances and struggles. On my many subsequent visits to neighborhoods and refugee camps across the country whose conditions worsened

dramatically over time, especially after the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, I was struck by the common thread I saw in the places I visited. Irrespective of nationality, religion, gender, or political affiliation, people were struggling to establish viable living conditions, resentment between host and refugee communities was on the rise, and fear from the “other” positioned refugees and host communities at different proximities from each other. I became painfully aware of systemic and structural intolerance, and patronage that has become deeply rooted in every political agenda and every policy design or the lack thereof. I started working to contribute towards sustainable peace and development by focusing mostly on the politics around refugees and their presence in Lebanon.

My perception of who we are and who other religions or nationalities are have drastically changed as I engaged in more study and work. My master degree education in Conflict Transformation at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia gave me the tools in practice to understand conflict and its different layers of complexities both on a personal and professional level. As a researcher at the Lebanese mission to the UN in New York, I had the opportunity to participate in high-profile meetings with representatives of the Security Council, and Lebanese and Jordanian personnel, to tackle Syrian displacement and its impact on host communities at the macro/national level. Upon returning to Lebanon, I joined the Mercy Corps to work on building the organizational capacity of 9 local and regional partners, to strengthen their structures for humanitarian assistance and civil society development in South Central Syria. Subsequently, my work as a Refugee Status Determination Associate at the UNHCR, put me in direct contact with asylum

seekers that shared their stories with me and trusted in my unbiased judgment in order to determine their refugee status credentials. At this point, I had a more holistic understanding of the crisis from a humanitarian, political, and legal perspective. Most importantly, being Lebanese myself, I understood and felt the tension between host communities and refugees.

Over the years, I have worked in the field practically and theoretically while doing research and work at the same time. The journey of becoming a conflict resolution academic and practitioner has taught me to self-reflect, understand the root causes of my own biases, and the importance of having guidance and mentors that could point out those fall-outs at any point in the research process. Training on conflict resolution skills and trauma healing helped me grow personally as I learned from the most vulnerable in the field to become a self-reflective pracademic.

For the current research, I applied critical thinking and detailed coding mechanisms. This is after triangulating the data I collected in order to offset any research bias. My training over the years, my understanding of my role and background as a female researcher in peacebuilding, and the guidance of my committee members throughout my research have insured my research remains objective. Approaching all political parties with an open mind as Lebanon struggles with layers of tragedies, has been key in communicating with all stakeholders to bring together the general understanding of a wide array of perspectives with respect to their perspective on the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon.

## **CHAPTER TWO – REFUGEES STUDIES**

Governments have been granting protection for those fleeing persecution from their country of origin for many years. Modern refugee law, however, has been in large a product of post-World War II era (International Justice Resource Center, 2012). The 1951 convention relating to the Status of refugees and its 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees remain the two key references to the framework of refugee law and in particular refugee status determination. Since different governments and regional instruments for human rights have elaborated on those rights, it is imperative to define those terms for the purpose of this dissertation. The following are key terms and definitions that I will be referring to throughout my research.

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

#### ***Refugees***

“Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. The refugee definition can be found in the 1951 Convention and regional refugee instruments, as well as UNHCR’s Statute” (UNHCR, 2016b).

#### ***Migrants***

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “While there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence,

irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more” (UNHCR, 2016b).

### ***Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)***

Internally displaced persons are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border" (OHCHR, n.d.).

### ***Asylum Seekers***

According to the International Rescue Committee, “an asylum seeker is someone who is also seeking international protection from dangers in his or her home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn’t been determined legally” (International Rescue Committee, 2018).

Note: Several of those definitions have been expanded by different organizations around the world or different definitions have been given. For example, the African Union expands UNHCR’s definition to include “every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality” (Organization of African Unity, 1974).



For the purpose of this study, we will adopt the above definitions leaving some room for flexibility. We will also focus on persecution as a result of war in the case of Syrian refugees.

### **The Legalistic, Political, and Humanitarian Challenges**

There are several legal, political, and humanitarian challenges facing refugees and host communities alike. The risks of hosting staggering numbers of refugees vary from disease outbreaks, land scarcity, food insecurity, overcrowded schools, overstretched health infrastructures, environmental degradation, and arguably increased criminality and socio-political instability to decreased safety and security. The effects of such a crisis will also increasingly affect children and their development. Nevertheless, it is also argued that refugees may stimulate the local economy with increased demands, the resources they bring, international assistance, and eventually develop the local infrastructure of the communities they share. However, there seems to be several challenges that may impact local communities. The following will be a broad brush of the various legal, political, and humanitarian challenges. Establishing whether the positives outweigh the negatives when it comes to hosting staggering number of refugees is unique to every situation. This being said, this section will thus focus on the strains to local communities when it comes to hosting staggering numbers of refugees.

#### ***From a Legal Perspective***

Several legal challenges influence refugees and their host communities across the globe. Those vary depending on local laws and the governments' adherence to international law; specifically, the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol. Hence, some challenges revolve

around the increasingly important issue of “non-refoulement”, the law and its interpretation, and the challenge of working with countries that are not signatories to the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol.

The 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees is at the core of international refugee protection law. The 1951 convention was written after the second world war. At that time, massive displacement was taking place in Europe. The scope of the 1951 convention is thus limited to persons fleeing because of events occurring before January 1951 within Europe (UNHCR, 2016b). The convention was later followed by the 1967 protocol which removed the geographic restriction. The 1951 convention is based on several foundational concepts. Those are: non-discrimination based on race, religion, or country of origin; non-penalization where a refugee should not be penalized for illegally entering a country to seek asylum; the notion of non-refoulement which states that a refugee cannot be returned back to where he fears for her/his life and freedom because of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social/political group; and highlights a minimum standard for treating refugees where they have access to primary care, education, and work. In addition to acquiring proper legal documentations such as a travel document or others.

The foundational notion of non-refoulement has been recently challenged with the Syrian crisis and the EU-Turkey deal raising questions as to whether it is legal at all to return asylum seekers to their war-torn, dangerous country. The EU-Turkey deal halted refugee crossings into Europe and allowed “Greece to return to Turkey all new irregular migrants arriving after March 20, 2016. In exchange, EU Member States thought to

increase resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, accelerate visa liberalization for Turkish nationals, and boost existing financial support for Turkey's refugee population" (Collett, 2016). Thus, the EU in collaboration with Turkey, halted refugees from entering its borders and found a way around the Dublin Agreement with one main objective which is to establish a common framework that sets the responsibility on one European Union (EU) member state to process the application of an asylum seeker. In addition, Turkey has also been accused of sending refugees back to their countries and breaking a fundamental aspect of refugee protection (Collett, 2016).

It is also key to look into refugee status determination through the interpretation of the 1951 convention and its 1967 Protocol by UNHCR governing International refugee rights. They are the main legal documents based on which UNHCR works with "149 State parties to either or both, they define the term 'refugee' and outlines the rights of refugees, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951). In its quest to determine whether a person of concern is given a refugee status, the 1951 convention follows both a subjective element and an objective element in assessing refugee status determination. The subjective and objective element is linked to the "well-founded fear" of being persecuted. The argument though is, whether a subjective element should be at the core of this assessment at all, when the objective element is present and the government is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens. When the expression "well-founded fear" is not a precise one, in particular, it invites debate as to the extent to which the fear depends upon objective facts and the extent to which it reflects the subjective state of the person concerned" (Chan Yee Kin v.

Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs; *Soo Cheng Lee v. Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs*; *Kelly Kar Chun Chan v. Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs*, 1989). On the other hand, if a subjective element is at the core of the fear analysis, then how can refugee status determination officers objectively assess the subjective feeling of fear- if that's possible at all. Therefore, different interpretations of the semantics in the 1957 UN convention adds a layer of complexity to this legal discussion (Hathaway & Hicks, 2005). It also gives more space for governments to interpret it as they see fit increasing the tension between the humanitarian lens, the socio-political and economic lens, and that of international law.

Not all countries are signatories to the 1951 convention and the 1967 Protocol. In those countries, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, the presence of asylum seekers is temporary until UNHCR determines their refugee status and a durable solution for them. The Lebanese Government did not sign the 1951 Geneva Convention. It has instead, in 2003, signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Fakhoury, 2017). The European Commission (2016) stated that the migrant crisis has exposed fundamental weaknesses in the design and implementation of the entire Common European Asylum System and more specifically that of the Dublin Regulation. Dublin IV proposal now includes amendments that establish a more sustainable and fair system in the allocation of the burden of refugees among EU member States and to establish arrangements to better handle arrivals through specific entry points (European Commission, 2016).

Governments and country representatives responsible for upholding international humanitarian law have increasingly recognized the severity of the global refugee crisis. They have more seriously taken the issue of refugees and its implications on their countries over the past few years. The Syrian crisis has definitely been the highlight of the contemporary refugee crises. Directly or indirectly, legally or unconventionally, governments have scapegoated refugees and have thrown this responsibility over to their counterparts; all while dismissing the humanitarian aspect of the crisis.

### ***From a Political Perspective***

The political challenges facing refugee host communities are also key to our discussion. It is, however, very difficult to address the political aspect of the crisis without highlighting the interlink with security and stability in the communities and the country as a whole. Several challenges include, but are not limited to: disrupting social order by acting as political subjects and challenging the notion of citizenship, facilitating the transnational spread of conflict, and changing the local demographic fabric. According to Isin (2002), migrants are disrupting social order and by doing so are making themselves into political subjects. By drawing on their colonial links, highlighting their value to the economy, and seeking legality, irregular migrants are challenging the limits of international humanitarian law through their mobilization (Isin, 2002; McNEVIN, 2006; McNevin, 2009). They are seeking a bottom-up approach that does not limit them, as political subjects, to state institutions (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011). This collective practice is for Balibar (2004, p. 49) a “contribution to the progress of the democratization of borders and of the freedom of movement, which states tend to treat as passive objects

of a discretionary power”. Hence, migration is playing a key role in the transformation of notions of citizenship which is challenging governments and structures in place. Today migrants in France and the United Kingdom are granted rights such as family unification, social security and, welfare among others. Those were previously considered entitlements for citizens who have rights and duties towards their government. Thus, these sorts of legal maneuvers are creating a new “civic stratification” or a new “hierarchy of citizenship” (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011). The acknowledgement that boundaries are blurred between who is considered a legal or an illegal migrant, a forced migrant or a person who has willingly chosen to migrate, and also between who is a citizen and who is considered a non-citizen challenges the notion of citizenship (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011). Therefore, it is key to call for a critical reflection on a new category of persons somehow positioned in a liminal legal space.

Refugees also play a key role in the transnational spread of violence (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a). They can expand “rebels” social networks and spread violence and war. Although the majority of refugees do not directly engage in violent conflict, their flow to neighboring countries may help facilitate the transport and spread of arms and weapons directly influencing the security situation in their host countries (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a). The combatants infiltrating are a challenge to both the host communities and refugees who are trying to find peace within their new communities in their host country (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a). The spread of arms and weaponry is sometimes accompanied by the spread of a conflict related to ideology (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a). This directly feeds into the spread of conflict within a state or between

one state and another as refugees might also mobilize an opposition directed to the country they are originally from or in the country they are being hosted in. Hence, “the influx of refugees from neighboring countries where fighting is already underway can provide the impetus and material for groups to begin an armed challenge, especially if the refugees share many of the same goals as the domestic opposition” (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006b, p. 343). It is important to note that, while states are bounded by international boundaries, social actors frequently interact with one another through socio-economic and cultural ties transcending national boundaries. This means that refugees may expand their geographic reach and may directly challenge local governments. Refugees may come together as a diaspora that would bridge with its dissidents across geographic borders and provide each other with the social, economic, political support, and the advocacy they need. In the case where refugees create a front to advocate and fight for their political and civil rights using their host community’s territory, then it is expected that refugees themselves will resort to violent acts that will depend in nature on the availability of resources, their coordination, and outreach (Milton et al., 2013). This is the case in Lebanon where Palestinian refugees and Palestinian refugee camps are seen as fertile grounds for radicalization and armed resistance. Following the 1969 Cairo Accords in which “the Lebanese government turned over the supervision of the refugee camps to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in exchange for the PLO’s pledge to obtain the government’s consent for any armed incursion it might make”(Khalidi, 1979, p. 69), the agreement was not fully followed and the PLO launched attacks against Israel as they aimed to liberate their occupied land (Hanafi & Long, 2010) . Therefore, refugee

movement may spread ideologies, weaponry, directly challenge the local government, and establish local ties to help mobilize their political acts and implement their political agendas.

The prospects of violence along with the refugees' ethnicity, religion, and other cultural compositions may change the social fabric or diversity present in the local community. Some locals may choose to move to other areas and others may want to support refugees and their acts thus dividing the population itself between pro and against their presence. In the case of Palestinian refugees, mostly Sunnis, this has challenged the fragile religious balance of the Lebanese population where every sect starts to feel outgrown by the other's number and thus feeling that their status is being threatened. This is especially the case if one ethnicity or religious group seems to be supported by the large number of refugees versus other groups. Hence, "cross-border fighting between "refugee warrior" groups and neighboring governments threaten local populations, the sovereignty of the host country, and bilateral relations between neighbors" (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a, p. 343). This creates resentment against refugees altering the local ethnic balance and towards the government allowing access to refugees.

All of these developments put pressure on the local government and heighten local resentment (Jacobsen, 1996). The government's inability to foster a healthy environment for rehabilitation and reintegration may also further deteriorate refugees' mental and physical health thus exacerbating refugees' radicalization (Milton et al., 2013). Other factors leading to radical acts and sentiments also include religious education and inability to access "well-rounded" education, unemployment, and



restrictions in freedom of movement (Martin-Rayó, 2011). They may also be exacerbated by competition over local resources that may depress wages for locals (Borjas, 1989; Martin, 2005) and important political segments of the community leading to violence against them and a general dissatisfaction with the socio-political and economic situation. Therefore, refugees play a key factor in the political and security arena.

### ***From the Humanitarian Perspective***

Although refugees may be seen as a stimulant to conflict, it is important to reiterate that this does not diminish their legitimate concerns and their humanitarian cause as they seek refuge from persecution and war. For the purpose of this section, I will focus on the humanitarian perspective from the hosts' perspective. This will be defined as the economic and social constraints within a cultural setting as communities host large numbers of refugees and consequently impact the human welfare of those communities. There are no clear indicators to study such an impact and it is again highly contextual. In the literature available and background research, when it comes to the socio-economic impact of refugees centers around labor markets, market prices and cost of living, and draining public resources. The literature and background research also focuses on tensions between different ethnicities and cultural differences that may also impact host communities' living conditions.

In rural contexts, the focus has been on the wages of agricultural laborers highlighting the increase in cheap refugee labor supply which thus decreases local wages (Maystadt & Verwimp, 2014; Whitaker, 2002). Local farmers in Tanzania hired refugees for work since it was less expensive to higher them than hiring locals (Whitaker, 2002).

They also worked in caring for livestock, constructing houses, and getting water or firewood (Whitaker, 2002). Refugees in Tanzania expanded both the labor market and the consumer market which also brought new opportunities with the challenges. In the case of Lebanon, migrant workers also worked mainly in agriculture, construction, and cleaning services. 50% of Lebanese work in the services industry, but competition over those jobs drastically increased with the large influx of refugees (Chbeir & Mikhael, 2017). In addition, “the average monthly wage of an employed Syrian refugee is at LBP 418,000 while that of a Lebanese worker stands at LBP 900,000”(Chbeir & Mikhael, 2017). Hence, refugees are seen to increase competition for jobs. Nevertheless, studies also show that skilled laborers could benefit from the refugees’ influx as aid agencies would be looking to hire local skilled laborers (Alix-garcia & Saah, 2010; Whitaker, 2002). Research on urban markets are more scarce, but evidence from Darfur show that migration from rural to urban areas negatively impact the agricultural labor market (Alix-Garcia & Bartlett, 2015).

While there is evidence of increasing food costs and the cost of living within the host market (Alix-garcia & Saah, 2010; Maystadt & Verwimp, 2014; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2013), there are other studies that suggest otherwise. In the Kasulu region of Tanzania (Landau, 2003) and Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, the cost was 20% lower in refugee dense communities than other communities (Enghoff et al., 2010), thus contesting this notion making it is very difficult to establish causality. Refugee camps have developed local markets for trade with their skills and have increased the purchasing power parity in this case. However, despite the positives, “the presence of refugees is also

associated with the depletion of firewood and building materials as well as competition for grazing land in the immediate vicinity of the camps” (World Bank, 2011). In addition, it is also important to highlight the negative impact foreign aid workers might have on local markets where rent and other commodities might increase in prices (Omata & Weaver, 2015).

The government officials of host countries have also argued that public expenditure and public resources are drained by the presence of refugees and their associated direct/indirect cost of living and care (Omata & Weaver, 2015). This has prevented economic growth because the state must now provide social and economic welfare to refugees while local infrastructures are stretched thin (Omata & Weaver, 2015). For example, the conflict in Syria has negatively impacted the health care system in Lebanon with an increase in demands in this sector, increased unpaid bills by the ministry of public health to contracted hospitals, shortages in healthcare workers, and a steep increase in communicable diseases (World Bank, 2013b) . For instance, “the number of measles cases, for example, increased from 9 in 2012 to 1,456 in 2013 and the emergence of previously absent diseases, such as leishmaniasis (420 cases) and increased risks of epidemics such as waterborne diseases, measles, and tuberculosis”(World Bank, 2013b). In addition, it is key to keep in mind unregulated work networks and living conditions that may also impact the socio-economic and humanitarian livelihoods of hosts and refugees alike.

The socio-cultural impact may occur simply because of the presence of refugees. This is especially the case if traditional animosity exists between ethnic or religious

groups where host communities feel forced to welcome refugees. This tension also increases when local communities view the status of refugees as one of more privilege since refugees may have more access to education, literacy, vocational training, health, sanitation, and basic livelihood with international aid services (World Bank, 2011). Plus, gender-based violence may also increase in households as men are able to provide less and females' traditional roles and family structures are challenged with the need to become providers for the family to make ends meet (World Bank, 2011). This is negatively affecting men's psyche and contributing to gender-based violence in households.

Refugees face challenging environments, but also often impose legal, political economic, and humanitarian constraints. Refugees also have an impact on the environment such as deforestation and firewood depletion and degradation, unsustainable groundwater extraction, and water pollution. For instance, refugees in Western Tanzania, used 65% more wood than locals because they would rarely put the fire off between one meal and the other while matches were rare and dried food rations took much more time to cook (Whitaker, 2002). In addition, human waste disposal by displaced persons can contaminate local groundwater and cause the spread of diseases.

## **CHAPTER THREE – THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS**

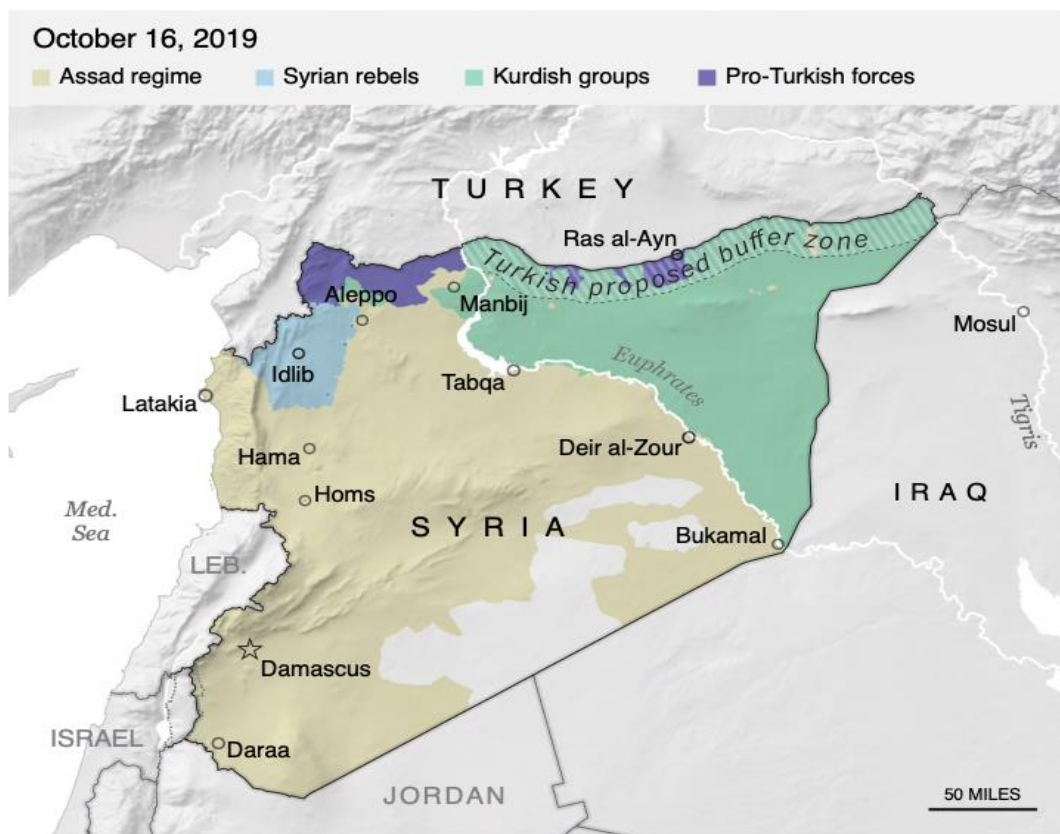
### **Syrian Civil War in a Glance**

In March 2011, anti-Assad protests began in the southern town of Daraa . The Assad family had ruled for more than 4 decades at that point (World Bank, 2011). It all started, amidst the “Arab Spring”, with teenagers being tortured after painting slogans against the Assad regime on school walls. Those slogans read “ Freedom and Down with the regime”, and “It's your turn Doctor” referring to President Assad, the ophthalmologist (Jamie Tarabay, 2018). Protests, initially peaceful, grew and demanded democratic reform along with the release of political dissidents. In late March, the army's fourth armored division headed by Assad's brother Maher, was sent to crush protestors by storming houses, shelling residential areas, and detaining those believed to have participated in the protests (“Guide: Syria Crisis”, 2012). Within days, the unrest in Daraa spiraled out of the control and local authorities were opening fire and killing peaceful protestors. Instead of the regime controlling its grip on the protestors, the protests spread into other towns and cities like Baniyas, Homs, Hama and the suburbs of Damascus (“Guide,” 2012). Eventually, protests became violent and different opposition groups and rebels emerged. Notably, in June 2011, armed resistance and large scale protests intensified with the burning of the Baath party headquarters consequently increasing deadly clashes between regime forces and anti-Assad protestors (Brown et al., 2018).

Fighting between Assad and anti-Assad groups reached Damascus, the capital of Syria, in 2012. The United Nations had already stated 93,000 lives were taken in the

Syrian civil war by June 2013 (Jolly, 2013). Claims of two chemical attacks by the Assad regime against the people of opposition held Eastern and Western Ghouta suburbs had killed hundreds of civilians including children in August 2013 (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Today, we speak of more than 300 chemical attacks against the Syrian people (Lombardo, 2019). Emerging from remnants of Al Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State took benefit of the turmoil and bloodshed to proclaim the emergence of their caliphate in June 2014 (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). By September 2014, a United States led coalition including more than seventy countries initiated attacks to disengage and destroy the Islamic State with the stated goal of preventing IS from using Syria as a base for its operation in Iraq (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). US led coalition forces were able to fight IS with their Syrian Kurdish partners in the field which then became a concern for Turkey and a challenge for US policy makers (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). As the Islamic State relinquished territories, the Assad regime and its allies made significant territorial and military gains since 2015 (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). This has further enabled Russia and Iran to further position themselves in the conflict. In 2019, Turkey launched its own cross border offensive as it aimed to expel Syrian Kurdish partners who were left without any support from their US allies at the Syrian-Turkish borders after a five year fight against IS. Turkey considers the Kurds in Syria represented by the Kurdish Democratic Forces (SDF) are a terrorist group linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) demanding Kurdish rights and separation from Turkey (Deutsche Welle, n.d.). This would also serve as an example for the PKK in Turkey among other geopolitical considerations. The remaining opposition strong hold of Idlib province in Northwestern

Syria was first captured in 2015 by opposition forces. As of 2020, under intensified hostilities from Russia and its allies, half of the province remains under opposition control (Pompeo, 2020).



**Figure 2**

*Map of the Syrian Conflict on October 16, 2019*

Note: Adapted from *Washington Post* by R. Noack and A. Stechelberg, 2017,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/17/what-trump-just-triggered-syria-visualized/> Copyright 2021 by

Washington Post.

The main factions and allies in the Syrian civil war includes, on the one hand, Assad regime and its allies (Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and more recently Iraq). On the other hand, the opposition includes the Free Syrian Army and its Sunni allies, Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Salafi jihadists like Al Nusra Front, the Islamic State known as Daesh (Brown et al., 2018). The US-led coalition, as mentioned, has fought alongside the SDF against IS. Turkey has also played a role. The opposition has thus been fragmented along different factions without a united front. In brief, Syria hosts at least 6 conflicts: Assad regime vs Anti-Assad rebels, Israel vs. Iran, Russia vs USA, Turkey vs. the Syrian Kurds, US led coalition vs. IS, Turkey vs Assad in Idlib (Yacoubian, 2020).

The United Nations has sponsored peace talks in Geneva since 2012, but it is unlikely that Assad and his allies would give any concessions as opposition groups get defeated and the Syrian regime gains territory back. In 2014, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 2254 was adopted. It endorsed a roadmap to a political solution for the Syria crisis (United Nations Security Council, 2018). The implementation of the UNSC 2254 has been met with several roadblocks and challenges as blood is still being shed in Syria. U.S. officials have stated that the United States will not fund any reconstruction efforts unless a political solution is reached as per Security Council resolution 2254 (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). In January 2017, Astana talks were initiated by Russia, Iran, and Turkey. Those talks led to the formation of “de-escalation areas”, two of which were retaken by the Syrian Army. Concerns were growing that this process was seeking to overrun the Geneva process led by the United Nations giving way for the Syrian



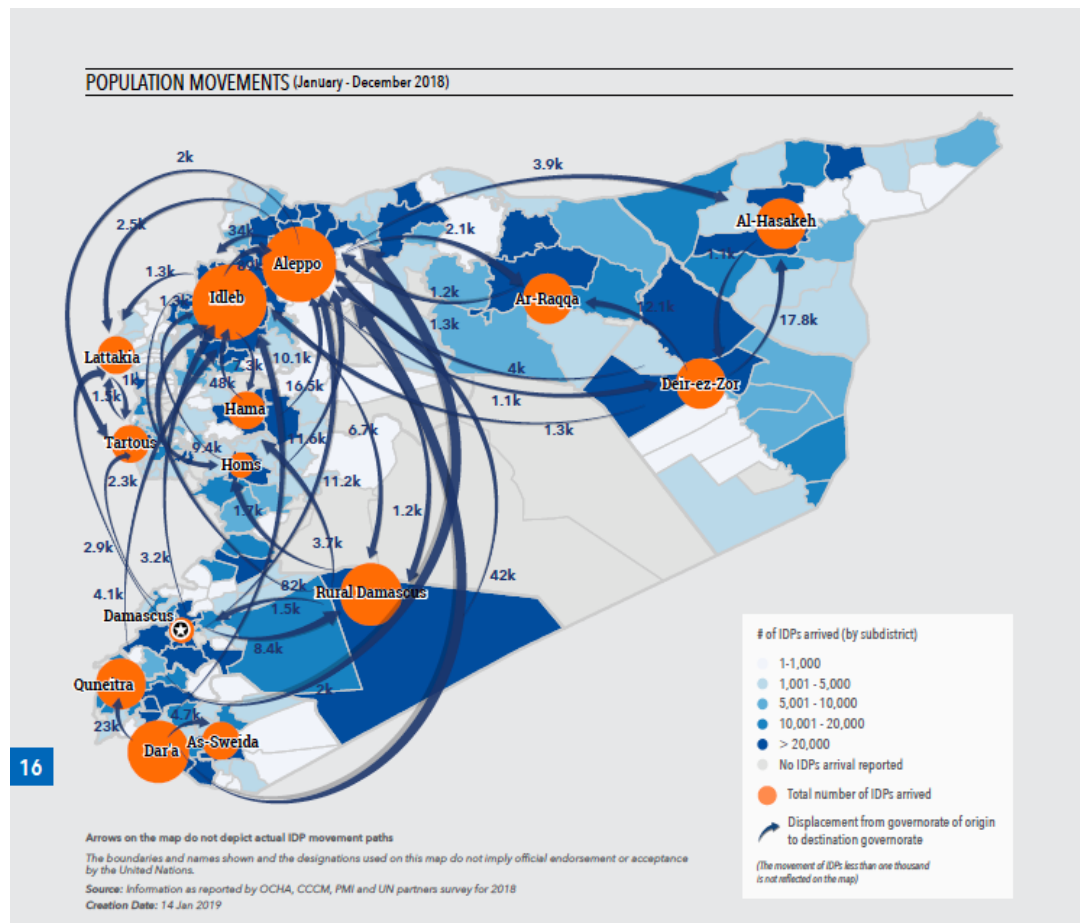
regime to manipulate its outcome (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). In January 2018, Russia hosted a “Syrian People’s Congress” in Sochi, in which participants agreed to form a constitutional committee comprising delegates from the Syrian government and the opposition “for drafting of a constitutional reform,” in accordance with UNSCR 2254 (Humud & Blanchard, 2020). The latter was boycotted by most Syrian opposition groups. In October of 2019, UN-backed talks to design a new constitution began between the government and the opposition. Conflict resolution specialist Renée Larivière of the peace building organization Interpeace, had doubts over how representative the process is saying it was premature to draft a new constitution while groups are still fighting in the field (BBC News, 2019).

The Syrian War became a proxy war where different powers actively engage to settle their differences and extend their influence. The Syrian conflict triggered mass displacement and is one of the biggest refugee crisis since World War II with 5.6 million Syrian refugees and an estimate of 6.2 million Syrians internally displaced (Global Conflict Tracker, 2020). At the time of writing, the Syrian Civil war is ongoing amidst a global COVID19 pandemic still awaiting a political solution to the crisis. The violence continues to destabilize the region making migrants and refugees political pawns for a war of push and pull between pro and anti-Assad allies. Peoples’ resilience has been continuously tested to the point of exhaustion.

### **Displacement and Migration**

The topic of refugees has become inextricably controversial, dividing host communities across very clear delineated lines. Globally, people are either with refugees

and their human rights or you are a national worried about your country from the risk of having foreigners. In the case where you view refugees in a more humane lens, you are also seen as traitor; whereas in the case you view yourself as a nationalist, you are seen as a xenophobe. There seems to be no middle ground between who view refugees with a humane perspective and those who focus on security, stability, politics, and usually the negative impact refugees have on the local economy. Many countries have long signed the declaration of human rights and preached about international law, but so many are failing to attest to those international values amidst the crisis. Many leaders and politicians tackle the refugee crisis from an interest point of view to keep or gain control of power at the local or national level. The following numbers portraying displacement of Syrians are staggering.



**Figure 3**

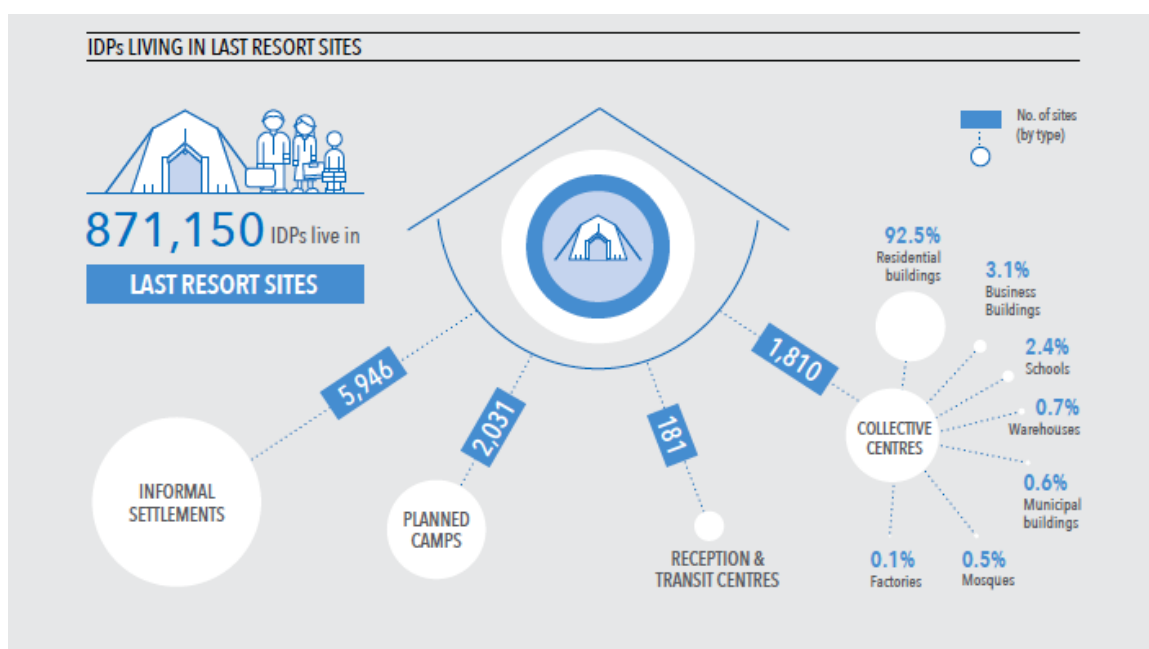
*Population Movement between January and December 2018*

Note: Adapted from Reliefweb, 2019 <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/2019-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-enar> Copyright 2021 by Reliefweb.

Internal displacement continue at a very large scale in Syria as the bombing and shelling

persists and no political solution to the crisis seems in view. Between July 2017 and June 2018, 1.2 million Syrians were displaced (Yassine, 2019). During that year, armed battles resulted in exactly 1,273,718 displacements from areas of northern and southern Syria (Yassine, 2019). Most were from affected areas in the north such as Idleb, Hama, Deir ez-Zor, Aleppo, Raqqa, Homs, Al-Hassakeh, and Lattakia governorates (Yassine, 2019). 95,000 people fled Eastern Ghouta within 3 months in the beginning of 2018 as the Syrian government with the support of Iran and Russia regained control of the area following fierce offensive battles (Yassine, 2019). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated the toll of death as of March 2018 to be 511,000 persons (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Syrian IDPs either live in informal settlements, informal camps, collective centers, and reception centers. Informal settlements are self-established camps where housing is established by IDPs themselves or nonprofessional personnel (OCHA, 2019). They are often on lands they have no legal claim to. Most IDP camps in Syria currently fall in this category. Others live in collective centers such as schools or factories whereas some live in reception centers that are temporary and for short term support until a more viable solution is reached (OCHA, 2019).



**Figure 4**

#### *IDPs Living in Last Resort Sites*

Note: Adapted from Reliefweb, 2019 <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/2019-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-enar> Copyright 2021 by Reliefweb.

As the scale and severity of the crisis intensify, the human needs of Syrian refugees become crucial to their surviving. Going into the 9<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the Syrian war is currently intractable. Persons who flee are the more exhausted and have depleted their means of survival. Across Syria, it is estimated that 11.7 million people need some form of humanitarian assistance by the end of 2018. Though hostilities seem to subside, the impact of the war leaves Syrians looking for 3 main humanitarian needs: Life-threatening needs among the most vulnerable, protection needs of civilians, and access to livelihoods and essential basic services (OCHA, 2019). Life threatening needs include

twenty-five percent of those displaced being women of reproductive age of whom 4 percent are pregnant and needed maternal health services, a third of the population in Syria has no food security resulting in undernourishment in certain areas, and “Outbreaks of measles, acute bloody diarrhea, typhoid fever and leishmaniasis were reported in various areas of the country throughout the year” (OCHA, 2019). Protection needs of civilians include Syrians that have been displaced several times over the course of the war, dreadful condition of shelters for IDPs, and the depletion of socio-economic resources for their survival in the country leading to child marriages and child labor (OCHA, 2019). In northern Syria whose population is around 4 million, only 50 gynecologists are available (OCHA, 2019). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO, estimated in 2019, around 577,219 newborns to require routine immunization across Syria and that approximately 320,000 Syrian children between 13 and 59 months have not taken all their required vaccines in their critical first years of life (OCHA, 2019). Moreover, “ there are an estimated 15.5 million people who require WASH assistance (people who are at elevated risk of consumption of unsafe water, including people vulnerable due to displacement), 6.2 millions of whom are considered in acute need (displaced persons in camps, informal settlements and host communities)” (OCHA, 2019). In these conditions, access to basic services and resources such as food, shelter, and water and sanitation are scarce.

The war in Syria has generated a humanitarian catastrophe with more than half of its population either internally displaced (6.2 million) as mentioned above or are refugees (5.6 million), living primarily in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and

Jordan (Yacoubian, 2020). As the conflict enters its 9<sup>th</sup> year, 1 million children were born in Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan; 51 % of persons of concern registered with UNHCR in those four countries are children, 10,000 of those have been reported unaccompanied or in institutional care as of 2017 (Yassine, 2019). Countries have adhered to different and often unclear policies about refugees. Bearing a burden, different countries have had their own internal struggles on how to manage the refugee crisis and what kind of assistance to provide on the local, regional, and international arena.

### ***Lebanon***

Since the very beginning, Lebanon has been a generous host with an open door policy allowing persons from Syria to seek refuge in Lebanon. It is estimated that Lebanon currently hosts around 1.5 million Syrian refugees amounting to a quarter of the total population (International Crisis Group, 2020). This is in addition to 18,500 refugees from Ethiopia, Sudan, and other nationalities as well as more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees under the UNRWA mandate (UNHCR, 2020). Lebanon claims the highest number of refugees per capita in the world.

Again, Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol. This means that refugees are supposed to be in transition mode as they pass through Lebanon. Naturalization or integration of any sort is frowned upon and fought against in Lebanon. Due to the historic sensitivities and the Lebanese refugee experience, further developed in Chapter 4, Syrians are labeled as “displaced people” (Atrache, 2020). The Lebanese government was unable to reach a concession on the strategies needed to manage the Syrian refugee

crisis and instead decided to shut the borders and impose strict restrictions making it hard for Syrians to acquire legal residency with a renewal fee of 200USD (Human Rights Watch, 2016b) . Refugees have stated that they are also being required to have a sponsor and this is view as modern day slavery (Human Rights Watch, 2016b). In May 2015, the Lebanese Government asked UNHCR to halt registering refugees creating a status vacuum for those who have fled their country, but have no legal status yet. The issue is aggravated in many cases by a lack of documentation, which occurs when children are born without any legal status since their parents are unable to approach authorities to register their children while undocumented. Though the aim of those restrictions is to cut the number of Syrians in Lebanon, such a lack of documentation intensifies their risk of arrest, ill-treatment/abuse, deportation, and refoulement.

In a country fighting for an economic revival amidst hyperinflation, pressures on its weak infrastructure is on the rise. Refugees live dispersed throughout the country or in tented settlements that are competing for scarce resources with vulnerable Lebanese who are trying to sustain their livelihood. Even though the Ministry of Interior issued a memorandum in 2012 to enroll all students regardless of their status, some school directors refuse to do so (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). Of 490,000 children, about 220,000 attend second shift schools, but more than half are out of school (UNHCR, 2018). Furthermore, with narrow labor market opportunities, Syrians seek to earn their living through informal markets which also opens doors to ill-treatment and lower pay. The government restricts the employment of refugees to work only in these sectors: agriculture, construction, and cleaning (Atrache, 2020). At the same time, political parties



representing the government are using refugees as a political tool to advance their own political agendas and vision of Lebanon. For instance, Gebran Bassil, the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement has continuously intensified among his constituencies a sense of fear of refugees. For example, he tweeted in June 2019 the following: “We have established the concept for our Lebanese belonging, which is above any other belonging.” He continues by saying that “We said that it was genetic and that is the only explanation for our similarity and distinction, for our ability to sustain and accommodate together, for our flexibility and strength, our ability to integrate and be integrated, for our refusal [for Lebanon to be a place for] any displacement or refuge” (Atrache, 2020) . This is not only the case with one political party, but is definitely one of the most outspoken within such a framework on refugee matters.

Although the public has shifted their attention from Syrian refugees to the economic and political situation, “the deepening economic crisis, rising frustrations and deteriorating quality of life may help spark new outbursts of anti-refugee sentiment,” stated Alex Simon, the director of the Syrian Program at the Beirut-based Synaps Network. He notes that “such tensions ebb and flow, and can be stoked by calculations at the political level or random incidents locally--say, an interpersonal dispute between a Syrian family and a Lebanese one” (Abdulssattar Ibrahim & Hamou, 2020). With double the trouble, between hyperinflation and the coronavirus, Syrian refugees are yet to struggle to maintain some form of livelihood, safety, and security.

## ***Turkey***

Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees in the world. As of August 2019, the number of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey was 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees (Leghtas, 2019). When the war in Syria started and people started to flee to Turkey, the Turkish Government followed an open door policy allowing Syrians in regardless of the means they use to enter the country. In October 2014, Turkey decided to issue Syrians a “temporary protection” status giving them access to health and education (National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, Turkey, 2014). It was not before 2016 and deadly terrorist attacks on tourists and Turkish citizens that Turkey began tightening the grip on its borders (Makovsky, 2019). Today, 96% of Syrian refugees live outside camps (Leghtas, 2019).

Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 UN convention and the 1967 protocol. Nevertheless, Turkey has never lifted the geographic location which recognizes asylum seekers from outside the European Union and therefore does not recognize those who have fled from outside Europe (Leghtas, 2019). It has nevertheless enacted its own law on refugees in 2013 which features “refugees” and “conditional refugees”. Conditional refugees are those who have fled from a geographic location other than Europe (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, 2014). In March 2016, the European Union and the Turkish government agreed on returning 1 million Syrians who have most probably traveled by sea from Turkey to Greece in 2015. In return, the EU would resume talks about Turkey’s accession and visa free entry to the EU for Turkish citizens (Leghtas, 2019). None of this bore fruit. In 2019, credible claims

that Syrians were deported back to their country of origin amidst intense identity document were denied by the Turkish authorities (Leghtas, 2019). In 2020, the Turkish government decided to put pressure on the EU so that they would support them against Russian and Syrian offensive and to keep their end of the deal as the numbers of refugees and migrants were becoming staggering. They did so by opening up the borders and allowing those who want to cross to Europe to do so. “The European Union has yet to allocate more than 5.6 of 6 billion euros, with only 3.5 billion of which were delivered, while disbursements did not exceed 2.4 billion as of last October” as the rising hostilities in Idlib push more Syrians to flee towards Turkey (TRTWorld, 2020). In response Greece suspended asylum seekers applications for a month and said that it would return illegal migrants back stating the Turkish government has become a smuggler of refugees (Stavis-Gridneff, 2020).

Syrian refugees in Turkey had access to health and education, but not the labor market until 2016. During that year, Turkey introduced a work permit that would allow them to be hired when their employer applies for a work permit on their behalf. Though changes in laws and access to the markets were incremental, Syrians were able to open businesses in Turkey. According to the government, every day 5 Syrian-owned businesses are established and registered (Akyıl, 2018). In general, a fifth of foreign owned businesses are owned by Syrians (Akyıl, 2018). Nevertheless, since the Turkish economy took a hit in 2019, Turkish citizens are starting to question their government’s decision to allow Syrians in claiming that refugees are taking their jobs and that their government is spending excessive resources on them (Leghtas, 2019).

Although a signatory of the 1951 convention and its 1976 protocol, Turkey has been carrying the burden of refugees while waiting for the European Union and the international community to fulfill their end of the bargain. Syrian asylum seekers and refugees are, in the meantime, struggling to secure their livelihoods, facing discrimination, and sometimes forced to return to a war zone.

### ***Jordan***

“The Syrian crisis has negatively impacted the progress made by Jordan over the past years, increased public debt, and caused serious challenges to the path of sustainable development for the coming decade,” Jordan’s Planning Ministry said in a statement (Federman, 2019). “Education, health and water infrastructure have been tremendously strained in several communities” (Federman, 2019). As of 2019, the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan is 655,000 persons (UNHCR, 2019). Those account for those registered with UNHCR only. 85% of those refugees live out of refugee camps. They do so to have more freedom of movement and because they realize that their stay might not be very short given the status of other refugees in the region. This adds a layer of burden on refugees who now have to pay rent and cost of living when their income is very limited; thus delving into debt. However, this also portrays the generosity and hospitality of Jordan who has been hosting Syrian refugees along with other nationalities despite scarce resources.

Jordan is not a signatory of the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees or its 1967 protocol. Nevertheless, Article 21(1) of the Jordanian Constitution stipulates that “political refugees shall not be extradited on account of their political

beliefs or for their defense of liberty” (*Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, 1952). Still, Jordan has no legal instrument to address the issue of refugees or asylum seekers even those who claim political persecution. The only legal framework that is instrumentalized is a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan signed in 1988 (Saliba, 2016). The MOU emphasizes that Jordan accepts the UN definition for refugees as per the 1951 convention, agrees to the principle of non-refoulement, and accepts refugees and asylum seekers to be treated according to internationally acceptable human rights standards (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013). According to the MOU, persons of concern may be processed in Jordan. Once given the refugee status, UNHCR will have 6 months to find a durable solution for those refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013). In practice, this is hardly the case since refugees still reside in Jordan years after their status has been determined and their file has been processed. Consequently, it is only because the government decides to turn the other way and that UNHCR has established meaningful relationships with the government of Jordan, that refugees are able to stay in Jordan past the 6 months grace period.

In 2016, Jordan became the first Arab country to allow Syrian refugees to work in host communities in select sectors by easing policies related to fees and work permits through the signing of the Jordan Compact (International Labour Organization, n.d.). Since then, over 159,000 work permits have been issued for Syrian refugees (UNHCR Jordan, 2019). Nevertheless, although the Jordan Compact has improved access to the

labor market, most professions remain inaccessible to non-Jordanians and thus refugees (Leghtas, 2018). Sectors that are open to refugees are construction, manufacturing, and agriculture.

Like any other government with a splurge in the number of refugees, the government of Jordan is concerned with its security and stability. In April 2014, the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD) was created to police refugees as “a branch of Jordan’s security services”(Betts et al., n.d.). In June 2016, Jordan shut its western borders following terrorist attacks and a surge in the Islamic State. The last point of entry at the border was sealed (Sweis, 2016). The status at the borders changed in 2018 when the Nassib border crossing was reopened and both Jordanian and Syrian government were now open to trade and exchange of goods and services(Al-Khalidi & Barrington, 2018).

As of March 2020, Syrian refugee camps in Jordan are under lockdown with the goal of preventing the spread of the corona virus. Zaatari and Azraq camp both house 76,645 and 35,709 persons respectively (Cuthbert, 2020). Refugees are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. With their freedom of movement already restricted, the question of sustaining their jobs in host communities and their livelihood amidst this pandemic will be an ongoing struggle.

Afraid of persecution, unable to return home or make a decent living, and unwelcomed by countries supposedly open to resettlement, refugees are physically stranded, mentally challenged, and emotionally overwhelmed. Issues of asylum still need a clear structure and government mechanism to establish a transparent working

framework that would address healthcare, civil documentation, education, employment, reinforce the concept of non-refoulement, and uphold international human rights.

Progress has been incremental, limited, and sometimes too late. With complex social fabrics, weakened government infrastructures, lack of resources and capacity to provide for refugees and host communities alike, the perceived socio economic and political burden of refugees is being tested and questioned amidst security concerns and the spread of the coronavirus.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – THE LEBANESE CASE AND RESPONSE**

### **Lebanese-Syrian Relations**

Lebanon and Syria have been closely interlinked throughout centuries of Middle Eastern history. Under the Ottoman Empire, the notion of “Bilad ash-Sham”, Greater Syria or Ottoman Syria, was a key geographical area. Up until 1920, it stretched from “Aqaba and Sinai on the south, the Taurus Mountains on the north, the Syrian Desert on the east, and the Mediterranean Sea on the west” (Fildis, n.d.). In the current international landscape this region includes Syria, Lebanon, Israel/the Occupied territories of Palestine, and Jordan. Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, served as a port for Damascus, Tripoli was located on its coast, and the Bekaa Valley was a proximate hinterland. All this fertile land was key for trade and travel. In fact, Beirut had become “the economic, judicial, educational and cultural, if not political, capital” (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 54) of what was referred to as Mount Lebanon at the time.

The secret Sikes-Picot agreement of 1916 laid down the partition of Arab provinces or “Mutassarifiya” (administrative units) in the Ottoman Empire. The agreement gave Syria and Lebanon to the French. Under the French mandate, the French wished to strengthen their ties with the Christian Maronites by creating a safe haven for them. This later laid the foundation of Greater Lebanon and the independence of Lebanon today on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1943. The boundaries were thus roughly delineated with the Sikes-Picot agreement (Fildis, n.d.). Following the withdrawal of the Syrians in 2005, efforts were made to demarcate the 360 km common border between both countries.. In



2008, an agreement between both parties was signed stating that demarcations will start from the North because Shebaa farms in the South, according to the Syrians, are still considered occupied by the Israelis (Nizar Abdel-Kader, 2012). Boundaries between Lebanon and Syria are therefore still not fully determined. (Blanford, 2016).

After 1970, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) calling for Arab nationalism and wanting to liberate Palestine were driven out of Jordan. They then established Lebanon as their operational base in their plight against Israeli occupation. As tensions between Christians and the PLO intensified, 1975 became a turning point. In 1975, the Lebanese Civil War began with clashes between Maronites and Palestinian forces mainly from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Sorby, 2009). The spark that catalyzed this war occurred when gunmen killed four Phalangists during an attempt to assassinate Pierre Jumayyil. Believing that the assassins are Palestinians, the Maronite Phalangists retaliated by attacking a bus carrying Palestinian passengers across a Christian region killing approximately twenty-six of the persons on board (Sorby, 2009). Muslims sided with the Palestinians who were predominantly Sunnis creating the Leftist National movement coalition. Later in October 1976, in an attempt to contain the war “under the umbrella of the Arab Deterent Force”, the Syrian Military army entered Lebanon and Damascus consolidated its grip over Lebanon. In 1977, the number of Syrian troops surpassed thirty thousand with more two hundred tanks (Nisan, 2000). In 1991, Syria enforces the Brotherhood Treaty of Coordination and Cooperation in May 1991 and thus establishes social, political, and economic control over Lebanon until 2005.

In 2005, Prime Minister Rafiq Al Hariri was assassinated and protests broke rallying in Martyr Square in what then became known as the Cedar Revolution. Eventually, the Cedar Revolution divided the country into two camps: the 8 March coalition (majority Shia and pro Assad regime) and the 14 March coalition (majority Sunni and anti-Assad regime). The opposition (March 14 coalition) accused the Syrian government of this assassination, demanded their military to retreat from Lebanon, and sought international protection. At that point, The United Nations Security Council ordered an international investigation into Hariri's assassination through resolution 1595 and found evidence of their involvement in the assassination of Hariri. As a response to popular protests and with the U.S. pressure, "Syrian government pledged to pull out by April 30, 2005" (Lebanese Global Information Center, 2005). Hence, the Syrian Army withdrew from Lebanon after 30 years of occupation.

In 2011, a civil war broke out in Syria and divided Lebanon into factions that supported and opposed the Assad regime. The war in Syria exacerbated "preexisting ideological, political, economic, and geographic issues that have plagued Lebanon for decades" (Young et al., 2014, p. 25). Although Assad withdrew his troops in 2005, Syria continues to heavily influence Lebanon. The lack of clearly delineated borders has facilitated the influx of refugees from Syria. Though the U.N. Security Council has sought to remedy the issue of border's demarcations with resolution 1680, no action has been taken (Young et al., 2014).

While Lebanon has suffered for centuries from colonization, occupation, and war, the 2011 Syrian crisis spill-over is the most current and the most prominent. At the outset

of the Syrian crisis, the refugees' influx to Lebanon was humanitarian in nature. Lebanon, with its weak government infrastructure, first perused its "open borders" policy and welcomed Syrian refugees into its territory. As the Syrian conflict became intractable in its escalation into a civil and then a proxy war, the socio-economic and political pressures on Lebanon were heightened. Most of the literature on the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon as focused on the decrease in GDP (2.9 percentage points/year), the burden on the health care and educational system, and the stressors on the country's basic public and private infrastructure (Chbeir & Mikhael, 2017).

The repercussions of the Syrian crisis have also been overwhelming to various religious sects. Sunnis developed a sentiment of injustice as the "moderate Sunni rebels" in Syria lost several of their strong held positions and the Lebanese Shi'a Hezbollah fought with the Syrian regime against those rebels (Sullivan, 2014). The latter considered this war as existentialist in nature (Sullivan, 2014). Christians on the other hand have felt like they needed to form an alliance as their influence and physical existence in Lebanon is dwindling (Aziz, 2016). Therefore, the large exodus of refugees as a result of the Syrian crisis spill-over followed by the occupation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Nusra Front in 2014 (Daoud, 2014), the emergence of Sunni Sheikh Ahmad Al Asir in Sidon, and the violence between Sunnis and Alewites in Tripoli (Wood, 2012) amidst an unstable security system have heightened extreme sentiments of injustices on all ends.

The large exodus of refugees as a result of the Syrian crisis spill-over has highlighted the negative perceptions of Lebanese towards Syrian refugees as different

Lebanese sect-based groups have amplified feelings of resentment. Refugees are also seen to compete on land, resources, employment, and thus frustrate locals (Milton et al., 2013). In this regard, Syrians have now restored their participation in the Lebanese labor market to levels that are similar to pre-2005 when Syrian Armed Forces physically occupied Lebanon (Chalcraft, 2009) which then prompted the Cedar Revolution. Tension is thus rising with the sectarian nature of the Syrian crisis and the delicate sectarian balance in Lebanon causing inter-communal clashes.

### **Syrian Refugees Weighed down by the Palestinian Memory**

The influx of refugees has been directly linked to an increased likelihood of an intrastate conflict or a civil war (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a). From a general perspective, refugees are seen by the host communities to disrupt the local balance of power and the country's economic stability (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006a). If the flow of refugees itself is problematic to host country governments, then it is expected that refugees themselves will resort to violent acts that will depend in nature on the availability of resources, their coordination, and outreach (Milton et al., 2013). This is the case in Lebanon where Palestinian refugees and Palestinian refugee camps are seen as fertile grounds for radicalization and armed resistance as clarified above. This explains the government's refusal to establish Syrian refugee camps and its failure to locally integrate refugees. Syrian refugees are now negatively perceived by local host communities who recall the militarization of Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

The Lebanese government response to the Palestinian refugee crisis has been unproductive and has deepened Lebanese resentment towards Palestinian refugees.

Today, the idea of managing Palestinian refugees by restricting their freedoms and any social or economic rights have not played well for the Lebanese and Palestinians alike. Consequently, it seems that the only means for existence for many paramilitary groups is an armed struggle from those camps (Crisis Group, 2009). With the inconspicuous political autonomy of the Palestinians inside the refugee camps, “Palestinians can bear arms, but only in their camps and on a few training grounds; these in turn become zones of lawlessness that Lebanese authorities cannot enter; and their weapons are aimed not at Israel, the purported rationale for continued armed status, but inward” (Crisis Group, 2009). This has only furthered the perception of Lebanese who saw camps as a cradle of fundamentalism and radicalization. Hence, since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, Palestinian refugees have been stuck between undertakings of various fundamentalist groups more known as “takfiri” groups like “Usbat 'Ansar and Jund al-Sham of Ain al-Hilwa camp and the later Fatih al-Islam of al-Barid” and the unjust rules and regulations imposed on them by the Lebanese Government (Siklawi, 2010). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, in the 1950s “Maronite leaders in Lebanon supported and backed the naturalization of Christian Palestinians”, in the meantime, “the mass of (Muslim) Palestinians were defined as [foreigners] and were excluded from this option” (Siklawi, 2010). The naturalization process was ongoing up until the 1960s and around 50, 000 Christians on top of the initially 28,000 Christians were naturalized; especially those who had family roots in Lebanon (Siklawi, 2010). The aim was to strengthen the Christian Lebanese presence in Lebanon amidst growing Muslim demographics.

The fear of further naturalizing Palestinian refugees that would impact the sectarian balance in the country, the activities of the PLO that used Lebanese land to fight against Israel, and the fundamentalists in the camps preying on the so little peace Palestinian refugees have there, are fears and perceived threats increasing the polarization and politicization of their presence in Lebanon.

Throughout the ongoing Syria war, Al-Asad's allies in Lebanon were concerned that establishing Syrian refugee camps would radicalize Syrian refugees (International Crisis Group, 2012). Moreover, Lebanese political parties have been hesitant to follow the refugee policy used with Palestinian refugees who are mostly from Sunni religious backgrounds which may disrupt Lebanon's sectarian balance (Hanafi & Long, 2010). In the meantime, Sunnis feeling of resentment towards Shia backed Hezbollah has been on the rise since the "events of May 7<sup>th</sup>" where Hezbollah illustrated its powerful influence over Lebanese territories. Those are clearly depicted with Sunni Sheikh Ahmad Al Assir's followers clashing with the Lebanese Armed Forces, Sunnis fighting Alewites in Lebanon's Tripoli, among others. Not to mention, the increasing concerns in regards to Hezbollah reactivating its resistance Brigades in Sidon; a demographically Sunni majority province (Zaatari, 2014). Therefore, religious factions in Lebanon are constantly looking to maintain or increase their political power and influence within the country.

### **Refugees and Societal Challenges**

Societal challenges are thus at the center of the refugee/host crisis where host communities coexist with a large number of refugees in comparison to their population size. As depicted in section I, the focus of this case study is on societal challenges that

may stimulate the creation of boundaries between refugees and host communities thus shaping identity salience for each group and consequently impacting socio-economic and political life.

In the case of Lebanon, in addition to the historical tensions since 1991 when Syria enforced the Brotherhood Treaty of Coordination and Cooperation in May 1991 and established social, political, and economic control over Lebanon until 2005 along with the fragile sect-based balance, some other challenges are the following. Significant increase in the demand of refugees has naturally affected market prices pushing them up when it came to food and basic commodities, thus adding more pressure on the tight budget of those who are poor. According the World Bank, “trade disruptions are pushing up domestic prices of some staples such as wheat flour, which has important implications on welfare, particularly for poor households” (World Bank, 2013b). Plus, by the end of 2014, around 170,000 Lebanese citizens were estimated to be pushed into poverty. This was in addition to the 1 million Lebanese already under the poverty line (living on less than 4 USD a day) (World Bank, 2013b). Considering the total population is 4 million and with the current fall of the Lebanese Lira, those numbers are assumed to be much higher. Inflation in 2017 reached 5 percent, most likely due to the increase in the cost of imports such as oil (International Monetary Fund, 2018). The labor market in Lebanon has also been more pressured with a market unable to accommodate to the employment needs of both refugees and locals. Approximately, “To absorb the growing number of job seekers, spur growth and meet the challenge of unemployment, Lebanon needs to create 23,000 jobs per year over the next decade”(World Bank, 2013a), which is six times more

the number of jobs currently being created (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Evidence suggests that informal labor among refugees in addition to a dire economic condition has caused wages to drop, alongside a drop in local labor force participation when it comes specifically to women and young people (Imus et al., 2017). In Lebanon, “the work informality rate in Lebanon rose by 10 percentage points from the 44% recorded pre-crisis” (Chbeir & Mikhael, 2017) . Competition between local communities and refugees over low-skilled jobs such as agriculture or in personal and domestic services such as driving or housekeeping, and to a lesser extent in construction has been challenging. According to Chbeir and Mikhael (2017), an “average 270,000 Lebanese workers were pushed out of work and, under a conservative approach, an estimated 150,000 of these jobs are in the services sector”. Additionally, Lebanese believe that Syrians work informally in Lebanon without health insurance and without paying taxes and that in return they receive support and aid from international organizations in the form of food and shelter (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). They are also willing to work for half or even one fifth of what Lebanese earn while also putting extra hours. Public schools have also been overstretched with their infrastructure growing under pressure to accommodate the number of Syrian refugee children. Syrian children enrolling in primary and elementary school has dramatically increased from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013 from 1500 to 30,000 children (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Those children are unfortunately spread across public schools that are the most vulnerable and deprived. The Bekaa, North Lebanon, and Mount Lebanon and been accommodating around 80 percent of students (United Nations



Development Programme, 2015). This is key because prior to the crisis, public schools in Lebanon were not overcrowded. Only 20% of both public and private classrooms were reported to be overcrowded with the number of students in class of 26 to 35 and the ratio of students was low in comparison to that of teachers (UNICEF Lebanon Country Office & Save the Children, 2012). To accommodate the increased number of Syrian students, the government had to re-introduce the double shift system where classes run in the morning and then they run again in the afternoon. This has drastically affected the learning environment and the quality of education for all children as the system is being over-stretched and its resources are scarce where initially 275,000 Lebanese students were enrolled compared to the need to accommodate 1.3 million children (No Lost Generation, 2014). Still, it is estimated that only 20% of Syrian children are attending school (No Lost Generation, 2014).

Those tensions heighten the division between “us” and “them” as Lebanese citizens view the refugees as villains trying to take advantage of what Lebanese believe to be their right as citizens who pay taxes that fuel public expenditure. Many express sentiments that reveal a collective chosen trauma focusing on the Syrian occupation of Lebanon up until 2005 to transmit negative reservoirs across generations and to justify acts towards Syrian refugees. Threat narratives, also detailed in the previous section, can help us understand those tensions and the system of axiology that underpins them. Hence, I am examining narratives by Lebanese political agents about Syrian refugees that reflect the relative positionality of both groups. In this issue, conflict may have developed due to

resentment from one party to another and due to existing positioning. This also includes internal party divisions on the subject of refugees within sect-based groups.

One repeated theme drawn from media reports centers on the perceived threats posed by these refugees, as captured by the theme that “the Syrian occupation of Lebanon”. For instance, in a mass rally against “Syrian invasion”, slogans read “We shall not become a minority in our own homeland”, “so we wouldn’t lose Lebanon, negotiate with the Syrian Government”(Bar’el, 2017), and “your Syrian government ruled our country for more than 25 years, now it’s your turn to feel what that’s like” (World Watch Monitor, 2015). In addition, a Lebanese citizen, Francis Yaqub al-Kami, told the Middle East Online site that, “the Syrian presence in Lebanon has become a social and economic occupation, and ultimately, it will become political” (Bar’el, 2017). Another theme is the threat to national security. For example, “suddenly, you have this idea that all these criminals are Syrians”, says journalist Kareem Chehayeb. “The drug dealers, the weapons dealers ... the cases of rape and sexual harassment, all coming from Syrians”(Al Jazeera, 2017). In addition, there is the threat to the socio-economic security which is one of the reasons Lebanon refuses to grant work permits to Syrians in Lebanon and has tightened restrictions on visas making it harder for Syrians to enter Lebanon. Lebanese have thus accused Syrians of negatively influencing the job market depicted by the following quotes: “We in Lebanon were jobless. Now, you have come here and are taking our jobs” (World Watch Monitor, 2015). “You’re doing every kind of work for at least half the salary” and “every item in the market is very expensive because of you Syrians”(World Watch Monitor, 2015). Therefore, the Lebanese case is a clear example of societal

tensions between refugees and host communities highlighting identity salience, favorable comparison, boundary creation, positioning, and threat narratives underpinning a collective axiology. However, it is important to note that both groups are not homogeneous and that identities are dynamic and constantly evolving.

Today, many Lebanese feel that the Syrian Refugee crisis is a new form of Syrian occupation and a reminder of the Palestinian refugees' experience. The history of Lebanese-Syrian relations and the affiliations of different Lebanese sect-based groups to their counterparts in Syria have heightened the sense of insecurities of those sect-based groups and created government deadlock where political parties mostly represent their sect in government. At the time of writing, the novel coronavirus is an ongoing global threat and the Lebanese economy is in a recession amidst protests over hunger and poverty since October 2019. All these circumstances make the subject matter more complex and key to address.

### **Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis**

The Lebanese response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis has been complex, but one might argue that in practice, there was barely a strategy to respond. In a confessional system such as Lebanon, migration policy is political and susceptible to causing instability amidst constant fears of changing demographics in the power sharing arrangement. The issue of migration may be seen as polarizing and as a tool of manipulation. In the absence of consensus over the subject matter, there are no regulations governing migration. Regulations take the form of an ad-hoc or executive manner instead of a legislation (Migration Policy Centre, 2013). Adding to the

complexity of the matter, due to the “brotherly” relationship between Syria and Lebanon, borders have been open for crossing without counting the number of Syrian migrant workers coming in the country to work mostly in agriculture and construction since before the Syrian Refugee Crisis began (Migration Policy Centre, 2013). Syrians entering Lebanon would only require their identity card at the point of entry (Migration Policy Centre, 2013). Eventually, freedom of movement between the two countries came under the spot light and citizens started fearing the large exodus of refugees and the pressures created on the government’s infrastructure.

In January of 2015, the Lebanese government was able to come together to pass new regulations governing the status of Syrian migrants with the aim of halting the increasing number of Syrians fleeing their country to Lebanon. At that time, Lebanon was hosting 1.2 million Syrian refugees which compares to a quarter of its population (Amnesty International, 2015). Syrians now needed a visa for education, tourism, medical treatment, and business to enter Lebanon (Amnesty International, 2015). According to Amnesty International (2015), “all require specified documents, including proof of hotel bookings for tourists, and appointments for those seeking medical treatment, in order to meet the requirements and have their visa approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Interior before being allowed entry into Lebanon”. It also followed that “extreme humanitarian cases” would still be allowed into the country. This has raised concerns over refugees that now needed to renew their residency every 6 months for a fee of USD 200 (Amnesty International, 2015). This is already a huge burden of cost on refugees who in most cases cannot afford to pay 200USD. It also raises

the question of those who would like to seek asylum through UNHCR in Beirut that may cross into the country illegally because of those new restrictions. In addition, all those who want to work in Lebanon will require a sponsor (Amnesty International, 2015). This almost makes it impossible for new Syrians to legally seek asylum through UNHCR in Lebanon.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, the first migration policy got preliminary government approval as a result of public pressure by citizens demanding that the Lebanese government address the unmanaged influx of Syrian refugees. Interestingly, the document, submitted by the Ministry of Social Affairs, only focused on a “return” policy for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The return policy stresses on the right of the Syrians displaced to return to their home country without any possibility of integrating them in reference to the preamble of the Lebanese constitution, emphasizing that the return of Syrian refugees is not linked to the progress made in the political process, and stating that coordination is to occur between the Lebanese state as the host country and the Syrian government among other stakeholders such as UNHCR. According to the Lebanese government, this is based on the fact that 89% of Syrian refugees want to return to their home the situation is mostly secure now in Syria, and the Syrian regime welcomes all Syrians back. However, in some cases such welcome includes arrests and detentions (Loveluck, 2019). A young man states that “people are still being taken by the secret police, and communities are living between suspicion and fear,” and that “When they come to your door, you cannot say no. You just have to go with them” (Loveluck, 2019). Syrians have also not been allowed back on the basis of their religion in what was coined

as “demographic engineering” (Ghosh-Siminoff, 2020). This means less Sunnis, the majority religion of the refugee population which the March 14 bloc in Lebanon related to the most with most Sunnis represented in it. The management of this portfolio would then be exclusive to the Ministry of Social Affairs after different pro-regime parties opened their own channels of communications with the Syrian regime in an attempt to share information and return Syrian refugees to their home country (Fakhoury, 2017). Those pro-regime parties have considered the communication with Syrian authorities on the return of refugees as a sign that the Syrian regime is legitimate and at the same time strengthen their position of strength in the country by consolidating their alliance and expecting strategic payoffs (Fakhoury, 2020); whereas the opposing camp viewed the refugee card as a means to cut down on their losses by contesting coordination with the Syrian regime and avoid any attempt to give the regime legitimacy or revive its influence in Lebanon (Jacob, 2019). Considering that the policy of return called for the de-politicization of the Syrian refugee crisis when the political parties representing the government are allies to the Syrian Assad regime, it seems that this narrative is still highly politicized and serves to counter the March 14 main bloc narrative who believes that the conditions are still unsafe for refugees to return. The policy itself also disregards the voluntary nature of “the right to return” when refugees feel safe to do so.

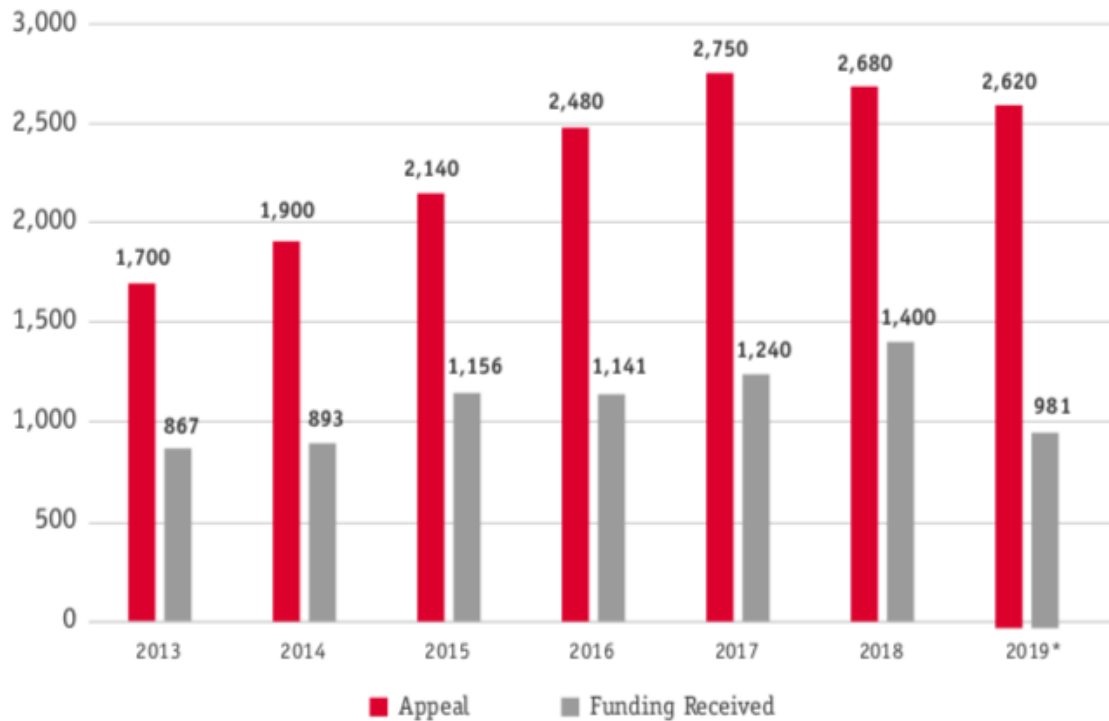
In conjunction with ad-hoc rules and regulations formulated by the Syrian government, Lebanon focused on several conferences on “ Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” to ask for international support through funding. Building on previous conferences held in Kuwait (2013-2015), London (2016) and Brussels (2017-2018), the

third Brussels conference renewed its commitment to the Syrian people and its host communities affected by the crisis (European Union, 2019). With the acknowledgement of the generosity to countries hosting refugees such as Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, a pledge of US\$ 7 billion for 2019 and a multi-year one of US\$ 2.4 billion for 2020 and beyond was announced (European Union, 2019). This was still less than the funds needed for the humanitarian relief and resilience for the Syrian people and the host communities struggling to offset the cost of the crisis in their countries. The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) to assist those host communities alone needed US\$ 5.5 billion to provide the minimum support. Following on the Paris Economic Forum for Development through Reforms (CEDRE) conference, the Lebanese government, led by Hariri, was commended for its work in relation to the commitments made to resolve the refugee crisis. At this conference, Lebanon won aid pledges of US\$ 11 billions of which US\$ 10.2 billion are in loans in an attempt to boost the economy (Marine Pennetier, 2018). The fourth Brussels conference in June 2020 also commended the tremendous efforts by host communities and the continued efforts to host refugees. It also acknowledged Lebanon's major financial crisis amidst a pandemic. Donors pledged a US\$ 5.5 billion plan for Syria and the region in addition to a multi-year pledge of US\$ 2.2 billion for 2021 and beyond (European Council/ Council of the European Union, 2020). Nevertheless, this barely covers the needs of host communities which amounts in 2020 to US\$5.2 billion for Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan in the Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (European Council/ Council of the European Union, 2020). Unfortunately, those funds in general and how efficiently they are used is questioned by

the Lebanese people who are now in a dire economic condition as “the collapse of Lebanon’s currency has led to triple-digit inflation rates” (World Bank, 2020). The following depicts a graph of the funds received by Lebanon compared to the needs (Mahdi, 2020).



### Funding received by Lebanon compared to response needs (in millions of USD)



\*Received funds for 2019 includes the period of January-September 2019<sup>21</sup>

Sources Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. 2019. 'Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 Update)'; and Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2017-2019. 'LCRP End Year Funding Update.'

**Figure 5**

*Funding Received by Lebanon in Comparison to Response Needs*

Note: Adapted from "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region: The Lebanese Government's Redundant Commitments and Slow Progress", D. Mahdi, 2020, The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, p.4. Copyright 2021 by The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

Though the funds needed are much more than those received, the Lebanese government has failed in implementing and tracking its vague and unclear commitment to donors (Mahdi, 2020). Those commitments include developing a national strategy for technical and vocational education and training, accompanying the former national strategy on education with an implementation plan, finalizing a youth action plan adopted in 2012, highlighting that a durable solution for Syrian refugees would be a safe and dignified one in compliance to the UN's treaty on non-refoulement, waiving residency renewal fees for eligible refugees, retaining students already studying within the Lebanese educational system; all while being transparent and accountable in the process of implementation and data delivery. Additionally, "during the 2019 Brussels III conference, the Lebanese government simply extended the promises made in 2018" (Mahdi, 2020) highlighting the country's constant lack of ability and/or intention to commit to address the Syrian refugee crisis (Mahdi, 2020). Unfortunately, the only met commitment was that of developing a national strategy for technical and vocational education and training (Mahdi, 2020). There is no accompanying action plan for this strategy, the Lebanese government has reiterated on several occasions the need for Syrian refugees to go back to their home country in contrast to the concept of "non-refoulement", only 10% of Syrian refugees aged 15 and above had a legal residency permit in 2019, among other commitments with insufficient data or a benchmark to assess their progress (Mahdi, 2020). Residency fees were only waived for those who registered with the UN before 2015 (Mahdi, 2020). In addition to that, in May 2015, the Lebanese government asked UNHCR to stop registering them and they were thus no

longer reflected in the official numbers. In addition, work permits in 2016 were only “accessible within the sponsorship system and conditional to Syrian refugees’ renunciation of their registration with the UNHCR” (Mahdi, 2020). This could also be framed as a violation of international humanitarian law where refugees in need of work to sustain their living must abandon their refugee status to seek sponsorship by a Lebanese national and consequently forsake their protection rights within UNHCR’s refugee framework and definition. Nevertheless, since numbers matter in taming the public’s anxiety over hosting a large number of refugees, those with work permits under this sponsorship system will no longer be counted as refugees thus deflecting, again, the real numbers. The government in such a manner would seek to re-categorize refugees where they would have sole control over their residency once they abandon their refugee status. It is important to note that, Lebanon refers to people who fled from Syria as “temporary displaced individuals” instead of using the term refugees to stress on their temporary status.

As of October 2020, the European Commission’s tracking financial report stated that “donor funding in Lebanon has remained stable, although the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan is only 26% funded” (European Commission & European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2020). Therefore, between the lack of a solid national strategy to address the Syrian refugee crisis along with the port explosion of August 4, 2020 and the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases, the Lebanese government is unable to contain and further manage the Syrian refugee crisis on all socio-economic, political, and humanitarian levels.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The tension between host communities and refugees may be depicted and analyzed through different theoretical frameworks. In this section, I invoke frameworks of social identity, ingroup-outgroup positioning, the axiology of identity and difference, chosen trauma, and the security dilemma. These frameworks will help in understanding social responses by Lebanese to the presence of Syrian refugees, including acts of violence, exploitation, discrimination, and other social boundaries which play a key role in host community-refugee relationships. The following will look at different dimensions including categories, relations, and representations of identity and boundaries created between ingroups and outgroups to further explain refugees-hosts relationships and the tensions that may arise.

### **Social Identity Categorization and Components**

Korostelina (2007), categorizes social identity theories into several groups: social identity as a membership, social identity as a role, and collective social identity. Social identity as a membership refers to the internalization of one's membership in a particular group that it becomes intrinsic to his/her nature (Jenkins, 1996). This is often the case through a socialization process (Korostelina, 2007). The person will internalize this membership that he or she will see it as intrinsic to his/her personality (Korostelina, 2007). They will thus answer the question of who am I as a member of a particular group (Korostelina, 2007). This group of theories originates from the works of Reid and Deaux (1996) ; among other academics, on self-conception and the group's influence.

Social identity as a role stresses on “the importance of the structure of one’s social system which includes functional roles, status positions, and the interrelations between the two” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 21). When a person has a status, a position, or a role in relation to their social identity, the person is in interaction with others in the social system. Role identities are illustrated as professional (lawyer/ client relationship), familial (mother to child), and attraction based (friends or significant other). Identity of one person here is interdependent of another person’s identity. Jenkins (1996) highlights two types of social identity: nominal and virtual. Nominal is that external identity which comes with a post title or a position, while virtual identity is the content in the form of embodiment which is very personal/subjective in nature and differs from one person’s internalization process to the other (Jenkins, 1996). Therefore, same identity roles might project different behaviors.

Collective social identity is derived from membership in a group. It does not only express shared systems of beliefs, experiences, and attitudes; it also includes a common goal representing the image and interests of that group (Korostelina, 2007). This determines the interconnection between social identity on the individual and group level along with the collective level that may be manifested in the political arena (Gamson, 1992).

The theory of social identity as collective identity has a cognitive and an emotional aspect. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), it is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”

(p. 255). This process strengthens the perception of similarities with the other members of the ingroup and of differences from the members of out-groups creating salient social identities. Henceforward, social identity along with social categorization have three main components: labeling through categorization, identification illustrated through behavior, and social comparison of “we” versus “them” (Korostelina, 2007). Identity salience has also been examined through the lens of categorization and the person’s readiness to use it. This means that a person is more likely to define him or herself with a membership of a particular group if this categorization clearly defines this group versus other groups sharing perceived similarities and differences, if it is consistent with a normative expectation about this category, and if it is relatable in any other way such as having ancestors or family members already members of those groups (Oakes et al., 1991). Other forms of analysis include systemic approaches: complex where components of social identity are examined without looking at the interdependence between those components, systemic where sub-systems are derived and analyzed without looking at the system holistically, and integral where both the components and the relation between those components in a wider system are examined (Korostelina, 2007).

Favorable comparison has also been key in the study of social identity and the creation of boundaries between ingroups and outgroups. It serves as a foundation for biases where ingroups tend to favor their group over the other without material evidence to do so. Therefore, favoritism “refers to the tendency to favor the ingroup over the outgroup, in behavior, attitudes, preferences, or perception” (Turner et al., 1979, p. 187). Sherif (2015) argues that the basis of this bias is an embryonic conflict at the intergroup

level by viewing the “Other” with a more derogatory lens and projecting hostility towards the outgroup. Research since shows that favorable comparison and bias is not necessarily the result of denigrating the “Other” or inter-group level conflict (Diab, 1970).

Furthermore, even though denigrating the “Other” may be sufficient to create this bias, it is not necessary (Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971). Favoritism, in other words, may simply be a rational decision and a strategy taken by the ingroup to advance their stance of the outgroup (Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971). Bias, on the other hand, is a projection of the individuals in the ingroup wanting to achieve a positive self-image through their group. Through social comparison, ingroup’s may develop ethnocentrism or may find that they can work together with other groups that have similar goals and value systems (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Hence, the desire for a positive social identity plays a role in establishing bias through favoritism of the ingroup and creating interest based boundary with the rival “Other”.

In all aspects of identity, and no matter the approach we take to analyze it, culture is also important. Identities do not forge in vacuum. Most of the times they occur in a social setting that may seem scripted for those would want to belong to a culture versus those who do not want to. Hence, positioning people along different divides.

### **Boundary Formation: Creating the “Other”**

Social processes are categorized into systemic, dispositional, and transactional. When we talk about systemic process, we are talking about well-coherent entities such as a community, an organization, a household, or a single person with the aim of explaining their location within the entity itself sometimes confusing cause and effect in such a

system where difficulties about identifying systems by themselves may arise (Tilly, 2005). Dispositional processes are similar in their coherent nature, but “explain the actions of those entities by means of their orientations just before the point of action” (Tilly, 2005, p. 14). They, however; do not account for emergence and cumulative effects (Tilly, 2005). Transaction social processes place interactions between social sites at the center of social processes; thus considering the outcomes of those interactions (Tilly, 2005). They have the advantage of placing language and communication at the heart of those interactions, and at the same time may seem as contradictory to common sense when it comes to moral reasoning where entities take responsibility for their acts and their consequences (Tilly, 2005).

Boundary relations, cross-boundaries, and within boundary relationships all make up notions of collective identity and difference. Certain notions increase or decrease their salience depending on the social processes they follow and the relations that are formed with respect to the other as they eventually form social ties (Tilly, 2005). Tilly (2005) considers those interpersonal transactions as the basis of social processes and thus supports the notion of transactional social processes. Consequently, he argues that those transactions develop identities, create boundaries, and can alter pre-existing boundaries (Tilly, 2005). An individual or group may have more than one identity that may shift in nature depending on any changes in the relationship with the “other” and the circumstances surrounding this relationship. For example, the repercussions of the Syrian crisis have been overwhelming to various religious sects where Sunnis developed a sentiment of injustice as the “moderate Sunni rebels” in Syria where they lost several of



their strong held positions and the Lebanese Shi'a Hezbollah fought with the Syrian regime against those rebels (Sullivan, 2014). Hezbollah even considered this war as threatening to their own being as a Shiite sect and its survival (Sullivan, 2014). Both sects felt that their religious identity was under threat and put it first before their Lebanese identity. This creates boundaries between in-groups and out-groups. Tilly (2005) stresses that social identities "center on the boundaries separating us from them" (p.7). Boundary change includes increasing/decreasing the vitality of those boundaries, their salience, and the differences with the other group (Tilly, 2005). In addition to, moving members from one side of the boundary to another and then relocating (Tilly, 2005). Those boundaries create ingroup narratives and across boundary narratives creating collective identities (Tilly, 2005). Cohen (1985, 1986) adds that communities clearly know their boundaries and are in heightened alert when they perceive those boundaries in danger.

Identities are dynamic and are constantly subject to change. Persons organize around social boundaries of us versus them by going through formation, transformation, activation, and suppression of social boundaries (Tilly, 2005). Therefore, social boundaries alter distributions of a population on either side of the divide in the social field (Abbott, 1995). A symbolic boundary is thus created and becomes an essential component of a social boundary (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Boundary change can be described in a wide array of phenomena. This includes the formation or dismantling of political identities, economic exploitation, discrimination, and changes in the status quo promoting uncertainty that can lead to violent outbreaks (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 1998, p. 19, 2002, 2003). In order to clarify how those boundary changes can lead to the

former mentioned phenomena on a small and bigger scale, Tilly (2005) identifies two sets of mechanisms. The first set is a set of mechanisms precipitating boundary change which means it happens before the actual boundary change occurs. Those are encounter where members of different groups begin interacting with each other, imposition where boundaries between ingroup and outgroup are clearly set, borrowing where a group may emulate notions from another group that they think is similar to theirs, conversation where exchange of information influences the relationship between parties, and incentive shift with rewards or penalties (Tilly, 2005). Those could occur in conjunction with one another or as a singular process. For example, encounter and borrowing can go together or a conversation during an encounter. It would also be interesting to see how conversations across generations may be precipitatory in nature when it comes to boundary changes since all those mechanisms have can be reversed. The other identified mechanism constitutes the boundary change itself to include inscription and its erasure where relations of either side of the divide or within a boundary are highlighted and may also be reversed through erasure, activation and deactivation where each individual is part of several groups and social relations are may be activated as it becomes more salient or de-activated as the boundary salience declines, site transfer in which individuals move from one side of the boundary to the other, and relocation combining two or more of the previously mentioned boundary change mechanism (Tilly, 2005).

### **The Threatening Other**

In many cases of protracted identity-based conflicts, the conflict parties tend to resort to threats and counter-threats that will impact their actions. Questions about the

conflict itself and the facts surrounding it shift from the events that occurred to a one sided explanation of who are the bad persons and when they will hurt “us” again (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a). Therefore, degrading the “other” to inhumane and wicked while looking at the ingroup as the higher moral standard “blending political realities with aspirations for immortality” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 12).

In order to better understand the conflict at hand within the framework of the above mentioned theories, it is important to look into threat narratives and the way they shape boundaries between one group and the other. In threat narratives, “blame quickly shifts from negative, individual attribution to collective denigration” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 29). It also asks whether the other group will target them again addressing the “normative standing of the ingroup in relation to the threatening Other” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b, p. 33). Communities that have a long standing history of hostilities across generations congregate multiple identities to a single prevalent identity such as nationalism, ethnicity, or religion (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). This unified front stands in parallel to the threatening Other. Consequently, as a unified dominant identity, the ingroup seeks moral legitimacy and security by delegitimizing the dangerous Other and placing great emphasis on myths that would outline the ingroup’s character (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). Therefore, threat narratives, “infused with moral indictment” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b, p. 37) about the other, are formed and shared through victims’ voicing their experience and telling their stories. This transitions their personal experiences on the individual level to a shared public danger where the public itself comprehends the truth about the violent culprit; the “Other” (Rothbart &

Korostelina, 2006b).

Threat narratives address at least one of those themes: normative agency, predictability, and global positioning (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). Normative agency is the criminal's culpability explained by focusing on the perpetrator's vices that are associated with tragedies and catastrophes (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). Another theme is that of predictability where the question of whether the perpetrator will strike or hurt again is asked. This question is answered through speculations at its best and constructed truths at its worse (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). The third theme focuses on the ingroup's normative position with regards to the "Other". A normative position entails "a set of moral obligations, rights, duties, and expectations that guide individuals in their interactions" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b, p. 38) . It gives legitimacy the group's resolutions and engagements as the group locates itself with respect to the other (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). Stigmatization of the "Other" and the projection of wrongdoing and evilness on the outgroup solidifies the pure virtues of the ingroup. With time, the stigmatized group can be scapegoated and held responsible for criminal activity and instability. With regards to the refugee crisis today, for example, refugees are used as scapegoats and blamed for real problems or for ones that are conceptualized whether it is increased criminality, overpopulation, or others (Mandel, 1997). This perception is strengthened or weakened depending on the willingness of refugees to return to their own countries (Mandel, 1997). Therefore, axiological difference is an abstract construct that addresses the above three themes of normative agency, predictability, and positioning. Stories shared then foster the creation of boundaries between the ingroup and the

outgroup. This is key since axiological differences are not static as the ingroup and the outgroup constantly reposition themselves towards each other thus shifting boundaries (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). Moreover, threat narratives show that ingroups rely on their moral standards and their self-defined character along with the circumstances at play (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). In brief, axiological differences are dynamic and are manifested in three constructs: mythic narrative emphasizing on what is sacred, sacred icons or symbols to portray a specific event or encounter, and normative orders where the ingroup defines itself by stating who they are versus who they are not and who the “Others” are (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b).

Therefore, threat narratives in complex protracted social conflicts emphasize the group image and the group narrative by singling out a dominant identity that is considered to be at a higher moral standard from the outgroup which is dehumanized and delegitimized. Those narratives are framed in a duality of vices or virtues where one group can only be in one of those two categories making the boundaries between them clear cut. This dynamic helps foster obedience of the ingroup because one cannot question the sacred. Those constructions are also based on the inevitable future where the “Other” will strike again and hurt the ingroup.

Vamik Volkan explains the mechanisms of threats and counter-threats through the social-psychology of chosen glories and chosen traumas focusing on specific historical events to boost the ingroup’s morale and greatly dismisses the “other”. To begin with, Vamik Volkan (1988, 1997, 2004, & 2006) explained large group identity as “tens of thousands, or millions, of people—most of whom will never meet one another in their

lifetimes—sharing a permanent sense of sameness” (Volkan, 2006, p.15). He explained how a group identity with its structure and influences can take precedence over an individual identity contributing to the inner group image. The main components of Volkan’s theory of group identity are chosen traumas (defeats/humiliations) and glories (idealized past achievements), shared reservoirs, minor differences, differentiation and integration, and projection. In order to protect itself, the ingroup must reinforce their differences with the outgroup by dehumanizing the other so that their group identity is not threatened and is strengthened. They use positive suitable targets of externalization to highlight their in-group image and negative suitable targets of externalization to reinforce the negative perception of the outgroup (Korostelina, 2007). This creates boundaries between ingroups and out-groups. Chosen traumas, are described as a collective memory of a tragedy or a catastrophe (Volkan, 1997). It does not only focus on remembering a certain event, but on sharing the memory of this event as a group “which includes realistic information, fantasizes expectations, intense feelings, and defenses against unacceptable thoughts” (Volkan, 1997, p. 48) . This can also be explained in terms of transgenerational transmission where a trauma is transferred from one generation to the other through suitable target of externalizations. The message may change and alter as it passes from one generation to the next. In case of negative suitable target of externalizations, the next generation then becomes the reservoir of such a trauma which may then be manipulated by political leaders (Volkan, 1997). Thus, those externalizations act as either positive or negative reservoirs. Positive reservoirs are represented through

trust individuals or allies whereas negative reservoirs are represented through threats and enemies (Korostelina, 2007).

For example, Christian Maronites enjoys the glory that Lebanon is the only Arab state with a former Christian majority rule and a current Christian president, while Sunnis take pride in the Sunni legacy and the Ottoman empire in the region. In order to protect itself, the ingroup must reinforce their differences with the outgroup by creating boundaries with the other. Hezbollah, for example, a terrorist organization to many parts of the world and a protection cover to Shiites in Lebanon, has focused on financing for training and militarization under the pretext of defending Lebanese territories from Israel; the enemy. In order to reinforce their stance Hezbollah focuses on martyrdom and commemorating their religious leader Al Hussein Ibn Ali. Therefore, Volkan is portraying ingroup and outgroup dynamics and the way in which this can lead into an inter-group conflict where the ingroup unarguably defends its boundaries and value system in relation to the outgroup or the threatening, immoral “Other”.

Taking a step further, Rothbart & Korostelina (2006), introduce the concept of collective axiology which is the value-system of commitments underpinning the actions of each group. Underlying the motives behind actions or focusing on what identity is salient, this perspective gives centrality to the system of moral values that in turn shapes the ingroup’s worldview, and thus justifies its acts. This system prohibits and promotes certain actions towards the goal of protecting or advancing the cause of the ingroup. Thus, the system establishes normative rules based on which members are evaluated to fit into that group itself (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a). Collective axiology represents a

distortion of reality that offers little room for reconsidering the interpretation of the threat itself. Hence, treating it as an ultimate truth that preserves the system. A system, I would argue, that seems rigid and which may questionably last forever until the “other” is exterminated, if that’s possible at all. The former further explains that the system of collective axiology stresses on “the importance of threat narratives as expressions of those value-commitments which are deeply embedded in perceptions of identity and difference” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 15).

### **Positioning the Other**

Positioning theory stems from the older framework of Role Theory (Goffman, 1974, 1981). It implies that social and political reality is constructed by people. While roles can be clearly defined and are relatively static, positions are more dynamic and are more malleable in nature. This is key to understanding the tension between history and memory when it comes to the Lebanese people amidst the ongoing Syrian crisis since 2011. In its broadest meaning, positioning theory is about how people use language and words to locate themselves in relation to the other. It has been described as “the study of local moral orders as ever shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (Harré & Langenhove, 1998, p. 1). It highlights that each person’s subjectivity is defined by each person’s history and interactions with whom they define as the other. In this case, we are looking into the Lebanese people and the other which is the refugee population and specifically the Syrian refugee population. Therefore, in this discussion, group norms are key in shaping the narratives of parties involved.



Each position is defined by the rights and duties of that specific position which are also seen as the “local moral order”. In addition to, holding assumptions to what this position allows one to do or not to do. Therefore, positioning theory is interested in what one believes can and cannot do and what they would decide to do in light of those beliefs (Harre & Slocum, 2003). Each position exists within a storyline where words and actions acquire meaning and thus become social acts. Hence, positioning is understood within a triad of elements that interact together: the storyline, the positions and the acts (Harré & Langenhove, 1998; Harre & Slocum, 2003; Moghaddam et al., 2007). In order to deepen our understanding to our research and to the use of the positioning framework, it is important to differentiate between illocutionary and perlocutionary force. Accordingly, an illocutionary force of an utterance is achieved “in saying something” and perlocutionary force is achieved “by saying something”, and thus giving meaning to the act (Harré & Langenhove, 1998). Therefore, the meaning of a morally acceptable act in a social context is drawn from a “local repertoire of admissible social acts” (Moghaddam et al., 2007, p. 10). In addition, storylines are defined as “the flow of actions and interactions in an evolving social episode” (Moghaddam et al., 2007, p. 11). Consequently, “acts of positioning and the positions are contextualized within a storyline, consisting of already established patterns and conventions, which the acts follow in a mutually constituting relationship” (Moghaddam et al., 2007, p11).

In the case at hand, I examine how narratives have historically positioned Lebanese in relation to Syrian refugees. On this issue, conflict may have developed due to resentment from one party to another and due to existing positioning. This also

includes internal party divisions on the subject of refugees within sect-based groups. Those positions are framed by rights and duties and are tacit in nature unless they are questioned and/or refuted. Positioning takes place over the course of an interaction and can be “deliberate, inadvertent, presumptive, taken for granted, and so on” (Harré et al., 2009, p. 10). They can also be negatively assigned to impose on the other what they can and cannot do which is clearly exemplified in curfews for Syrians in several Lebanese municipalities. Positions are interpretative in nature and different persons may interpret them differently or assign multiple meanings to them. This can happen at the individual or the collective/national level. Hence, positioning theory is transient in nature and can exist simultaneously with other positions or occupy pre-existing ones.

### **Security, Relative Deprivation, and Intergroup Relations**

Several other factors such as the security dilemma, relative deprivation, and intergroup relations influence the creation of boundaries between ingroups and outgroups.

Hertz (1950) describes the security dilemma as a situation where a group of people realize that they need the other group’s assistance to survive, and are thus faced with the dilemma of socially interacting with those people who may potentially threaten their lives. Therefore, in an environment filled with uncertainty, they live in suspicion and fear of the “Others” and their intentions. Consequently, this fear may lead to violence and tensions between both groups. Nevertheless, Hertz (1950) explains that in reality, there may be no reason to fear any bad intention. Still, this mutual fear may bring about what was mostly feared by both groups. This brings to the equation two elements:

information failure and credible commitments. Those elements are directly linked to the uncertain environment leading to the security dilemma and inciting conflict (*The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*, 1988). Though the security dilemma has been traditionally analyzed at the states' level through an international relations or political science lens (Jervis, 1976; Ralph & Collins, 1999), it also provides an opportunity to study its function in identity conflicts (Korostelina, 2007). When the ingroup considers the outgroup as a threat and sees any gain for the outgroup as a loss for the ingroup, it is a win-lose situation. This comparison leads to competition between both group in order for each group to prove their grounds and maintain or achieve a status. In such situations, the ingroup is building its knowledge of the outgroup through assumptions, stereotypes, and historical events such as chosen traumas or glories (Korostelina, 2007). Those perceptions may also be the result of favorable comparisons and prejudice where the outgroup is perceived as evil and ingroup feels threatened by that evil. The ingroup's salient identity will thus homogenize the outgroup as evil and act accordingly (Korostelina, 2007). The outgroup would then definitely feel threatened and the interaction between both groups becomes hostile and spirals into conflict (Korostelina, 2007).

Relative deprivation also creates a perception of inequality between one group and the other especially when one group realizes that the other has a better standard of living and that they have the opportunity to achieve that same standard. This, relative deprivation can lead to social activity that may by itself lead to violence (Korostelina, 2007). Even in situations of social and economic inequalities, ingroup/outgroup

comparisons lead to an underestimation of the ingroup's socio-economic power and increases the perception of relative deprivation that may fuel other hostilities (Gurr, 1993).

Intergroup relations, as pointed out above, are also key to our understanding of intergroup boundaries. Korostelina (2007) explains intergroup relations through intergroup prejudice, outgroup threat, and ingroup support. Intergroup support stems from the negative perception of the outgroup and the positive perception of the ingroup which increases the possibility of conflict as those groups see each other on the opposite spectrum of each other (Korostelina, 2007). This might consequently provoke hostilities between both groups. The perception of outgroup threat increases intergroup prejudice and any situation of contact or close proximity will only increase hostilities towards the outgroup (Korostelina, 2007). Prejudice will thus promote the negative "Other" and justify their treatment to the outgroup (Korostelina, 2007). The perception of threat may arise from different factors such unequal economic conditions, the political position of different ethnic groups, holding different citizenship, memories of previous events where the outgroup was seen as hostile, and possible socio-economic limitations set by the outgroup over the ingroup (Korostelina, 2007). Korostelina (2007) explains that, "among the triggering factors are the following: (a) changes in the demography of groups (including asymmetrical birth rate, the politics of natalism, or baby boom); (b) economic competition; (c) new territorial claims of outgroups; (d) new barriers to upward mobility, economic competition, and the rise of the educational level and mobility of outgroups; and (e) intentions to change the existing intergroup positions" (p.209). Ingroup support,

on the other hand, is the united front that members maintain when it comes to their goals and aspiration and their perception of the “Other (Korostelina, 2007). The more ingroup members are ready to fight outgroup members, the more the readiness of the conflict will increase (Korostelina, 2007). According to the ‘false consensus effect’ (Lee Ross et al., 1977), ingroup support for violent acts vary between minority and majority groups. Minority groups tend of overestimate their ingroup support on certain standpoints sand underestimate their counterparts support on the same points (Sanders & Mullen, 1983). As interests align, ingroup identity, ingroup support, and outgroup threat play a role in the ingroup’s readiness to defend its goals. Nevertheless, “the readiness to oppose outgroup goals is connected only with ingroup interests” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 7). In order to analyze a conflict, it is thus important to analyze different identity characterization, look into relative deprivation and the security dilemma, and their overall impact on conflict escalation or de-escalation.

## CHAPTER SIX – RESEARCH DESIGN

The *objective* of this research is to undergo a *qualitative study* to examine the research question: What is the general understanding of the Syrian Refugee crisis, regarding categories of identity and difference, from the perspective of Lebanese political groups? In previous chapters, I have explored a theoretical framework that framed the subject of Syrian refugees from the perspective of Lebanese political groups. I have looked into the impact refugees have had on their host communities and how those communities, through their political party leaders, have contributed to the ambiguity and precarity around refugees and migration policies in Lebanon. This chapter will introduce thematic analysis as the methodology used to make meaning and tie together the theoretical framework to my research in practice.

### **Political Parties Background**

There are several political parties currently active in Lebanon. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen the ones that I believe still play a significant role in the political arena today in terms of their representation and diversity in the Lebanese parliament. Those are the ones that cover main sect-based groups such as Christians, Christians of Armenian descent, Sunnis, Shia, and Druz. They all have clear agendas and loyalties that may have shifted throughout history when it comes to the Syrian government in terms of whether they are pro or against it. The following will give an insight into the different political powers and their historical presence in Lebanon. They are listed in alphabetical order.

### ***Amal Movement (Amal)***

Amal, currently headed by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, was established by Imam Moussa Al Sadr, of Iranian origin, in 1974 to gather Shiites under the banner of lifting deprivation from the deprived (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). Imam Moussa Al Sadr thought to benefit from the increasing number of Shia in terms of demographics to advance their political rights (Hazran, 2009). His aim was not to gain control over the state, but the reconfiguration of “the confessional system by increasing Shiite participation in decision-making and local politics” (Hazran, 2009). Between the PLO and the Israeli aggressions in the South, the party has been greatly influenced and impacted by the Arab-Israeli war which is clearly stated in the meaning of the word “Amal”. Amal is a shortening of the phrase “Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniya” which in turn translates in English to Battalions of the Lebanese Resistance (Hazran, 2009). Sadr’s activism sought to provide the Shia population with social institutions like the known “Movement of the Deprived” asserting the exclusion and deprivation Shiite communities have faced in Lebanon, and creating a discourse around social justice in addition to the motivation to mobilize around this goal (Hazran, 2009). Berri took over the leadership of the party after the abduction of Imam Moussa Al Sadr along with two of his associates in 1978 while on an official trip in Libya (Siklawi, 2012). Amal had numerous confrontations with the Israeli invasion and aggression and authority in President Amin Gemayel era. It engaged in the 1975 civil war and also fought Hezbollah. After the end of the civil war, it was forced to demilitarize and pushed the party into political life (Siklawi, 2010). It participated in parliamentary elections forming a key

component in the Lebanese political arena (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). Berri today remain supported by the Syrian regime.

### ***Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tashnag)***

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation was founded in 1980 in Tbilisi (Georgia today) which was at that time part of the Russian Empire with the aim of defending Armenians from the Ottoman Empire (Encyclopedia, 2021a). Initially, it was active in the Republic of Armenia from 1918 till 1920 before Sovietization. Afterwards, it moved abroad first to Iran and then to the Beirut Lebanon where it established its headquarters (Encyclopedia, 2021a). In the 1958 civil war, it sided with president Camille Chamoun and the Phalangists party who were pro-Western government and against Sovietization (Geukjian, 2007). From Beirut Lebanon, it managed Armenian politics in the Middle East up until the civil war in 1975 (Encyclopedia, 2021a). During the 1975 civil war, the Tashnaag party along with other Armenian parties adopted the policy of positive neutrality because of the following factors: (a) the Armenian leadership did not want to get into another 1958 scenario (b) they wanted to be united on their objectives of pursuing the Armenian Cause and to preserve the united Armenian identity of the diaspora, and (c) it was important for the Armenian communities to be seen as playing a constructive role in their communities and as part of the countries' they are in (Geukjian, 2007). Today, Tashnag is headed by Secretary General Hagop Pakradounian. The party is considered the largest representation of Lebanese from Armenian descent (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). Tashnag is part of the Change and Reform Bloc led by the Free Patriotic Movement (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018) which is currently in



coalition with Hezbollah who is a strong proponent of the Syrian Assad regime. It has had representation in the Lebanese parliament since 1942 (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018).

### ***Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)***

FPM, currently headed by Gebran Bassil, goes back to 1989 when General Michel Aoun headed a military transition government in 1989 after the Lebanese civil war (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018) which he was part of. In 1991, he was smuggled out of Lebanon by the French where he lived in exile and worked on his political agenda; part of which was calling Syrian armies to withdraw from Lebanon (Collard, 2019). The party was officially established after his return from France in 2005 with the 2005 Cedar revolution which also coincided with the Syrian Army withdrawing from Lebanese territories (Collard, 2019). The party has since won the majority of Christian seats in the government. In its Charter, it calls for ensuring the sovereignty of the Lebanese state, its independence, and its continuity (Tayyar Official Website, n.d.). It believes in social justice and democracy entrusted in local government institutions (Tayyar Official Website, n.d.). Moreover, it calls for the establishing an optional personal civil law that would separate religion from what is personal and should be under civil law (Tayyar Official Website, n.d.). In 2006, it created an alliance with Hezbollah through a memorandum of understanding. Supporters of the FPM consider that this alliance saved Lebanon and succeeded in breaking through the rift between Maronite Christians and Shia Muslims (Collard, 2019). Bassil and Aoun have backed the Syrian Assad regime since the very beginning (Haboush, 2019). In 2020, The U.S. placed sanctions on the

premises of corruption against Gebran Bassil, a strong ally to Hezbollah (BBC News, 2020). He responded by stating that “sanctions have not frightened me and promises have not tempted me”(BBC News, 2020). General Michel Aoun is currently the president of Lebanon (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). He was endorsed in 2016 by the Lebanese Forces (Khairallah, 2016).

### ***Future Movement (FM)***

FM, headed by Saad Al Hariri, was founded by the late Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri in the mid-1990s. Rafik Hariri, at that time, gained visibility by introducing a project to rebuild Beirut after the end of the 1982 Israeli invasion (Ouaiss, 2009). While many Lebanese welcomed this initiative, “many Lebanese accused Hariri of indebting the country and being involved in corrupt deals which involved the Syrian regime that controlled Lebanon at the time” (Ouaiss, 2009). He was a rich Lebanese businessman with close ties to Saudi Arabia (Ouaiss, 2009). He played a key role in the Taif agreement after the civil war of 1975 came to an end. He held the prime minister position several time from 1992 till 2004 while he was promoting Sunni interests by strengthening the Future Movement in that capacity (Ouaiss, 2009). Rafik Al Hariri was assassinated in 2005 and his son Saad Al Hariri took over the leadership of the political party which was officially registered in 2007 as a non-sectarian political party (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018) that seeks to enhance Lebanese lives and is non-ideological. They were at that time a key party in the March 14 alliance. Its followers are mostly Sunnis (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). In 2020, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon back by the United Nations “sentenced a member of the Hezbollah militant group to life in prison after convicting

him in absentia of conspiring in the 2005 car-bomb attack that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri of Lebanon” (Hubbard, 2020). Hariri, the son, inherited the leadership of the Future movement and also that of the Prime minister where he held several positions since his father’s assassination. He has been a strong opponent to the Assad regime in Syria and has urged Hezbollah to withdraw from the Syrian civil war (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2017).

### ***Hezbollah***

Hezbollah, currently headed by Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah after the assassination of Abbas Al Moussawi in 1992, was founded in the early 1980s with the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). It has a paramilitary wing and is at the same time a political party in Lebanon. Its Jihad Council is its paramilitary wing and its political wing is called Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc in the Lebanese parliament (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). The party strictly stands against Israel, its policies, and has resisted its occupation of Lebanon especially in the South. After the Lebanese civil war of 1975, it integrated into political life to uphold Shia political interests and its military organizations in the country and the region. After the Amal-Hezbollah war between 1988 and 1990, Hezbollah became more open towards Syria (Siklawi, 2012) in its national and regional agenda. Hezbollah’s ideology is based on the abolishment of the confessional system and the establishment of the Islamic order in its open letter published in 1985 (Hazran, 2009). They were urged, over the years, to amend the language of this open letter. In the 2009 manifesto, Hezbollah calls for a “modern electoral law with accurate electoral representation” which would better portray

the increasing Shia demographics (Franklin Lamb, 2009). They also stated that “ even though the Party has made clear that establishing an Islamic Republic of Lebanon is no longer a priority and emphasizes that Lebanon’s diversity is respected, valued and permanent”(Franklin Lamb, 2009). Hezbollah and Israel have fought on different terrains and in different ways, the last of which is the 2006 war. It has also previously succeeded in pushing the Israelis out of the Southern Lebanese territories in 2000 (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). Hezbollah is part of the March 8 alliance, which was later joined by the Free Patriotic movement in a settlement between both parties after the end of the Syrian occupation. Hezbollah has also intervened in the Syrian war along the Assad regime which created a stark divide between the March 18 and March 8 camps (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). It is designated as a resistance party in Lebanon and as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States (United States Department of State, 1997) and a large portion of the International community.

### ***Kataeb Party (Kataeb)***

Kataeb, currently headed by Sami Gemayel, began as a national youth movement headed by Pierre Gemayel in 1936 which then turned into a political party in 1952. In 1970, it became one of the most prominent political players in the country (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). The Kataeb party, also known today as the Lebanese Phalanges, opposed the 1969 Cairo agreement which allowed for the PLO to use Lebanese land to fight against Israel. Soon after, during the 1975 civil war, the Kataeb found themselves to be a resistance group fiercely fighting against the PLO trying to create their own land on Lebanese territories (The Lebanese Phalanges, n.d.). Pierre

Gemayel, head of the Lebanese resistance and President elect, was assassinated by a Beirut Blast whose architect was the SSNP (The Lebanese Phalanges, n.d.). After the civil war, Kataeb party regrouped separately from the Lebanese forces. The Kataeb party played an instrumental role in the Cedar revolution that shaped Lebanon's second independence after Syrian troops left Lebanese territories. The party's vision to achieving peace and stability in Lebanon entails the promotion of a decentralized political system where cultural pluralism can be well managed, "ending the pariah status of several Lebanese and non-Lebanese groups such as Hezbollah, Palestinian armed militias and other Islamists, and call for their immediate decommissioning", committing to all UNSC resolutions Lebanon is a signatory of, and safeguarding the freedom and presence of the Christian community in Lebanon (The Lebanese Phalanges, n.d.). The party today is in stark disagreement with Hezbollah and its activities in Syria and internally in Lebanon since it believes Hezbollah is trying to impose its own culture and own will on the Lebanese fabric (The Lebanese Phalanges, n.d.).

### ***Lebanese Forces (LF)***

LF, currently headed by Samir Geagea, was primarily formed by President Bashir Gemayel in 1976 as a military wing to the Christian forces known as the Lebanese Front fighting during the Lebanese civil war. During the civil war, the Lebanese front took arms to fight in the face of mounting Palestinian attacks on right wing Christian organizations and deemed that the government was incapable of keeping Lebanese territories safe and sovereign (Lebanese Forces, n.d.; Ouaiss, 2009). President Amine Gemayel, during the war, engaged in the "war of liberation" against Syrians occupying

part of Lebanon (Ouaiss, 2009). Soon after a war broke between LF and FPM which resulted in Syrian troops entering Lebanon and gaining control of all the Christian areas that were still not under its control (Ouaiss, 2009). Aoun was forcefully exiled by the Syrians, LF's assets were seized, and Geagea was imprisoned (Khalaf, 2002). After the Taef Accord, like many other militias, it was demilitarized and worked in the political arena. The party's current president was imprisoned in April 1994 and was also released after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). The Lebanese forces state that their mission entails ensuring a sovereign and secure Lebanon to all its citizens, promoting true and fair political processes and political participation, builds on the diversity that exists in the Lebanese society, and is against an ideology that would promote Lebanon being joined to any other country (Lebanese Forces, n.d.). The party has signed a letter of intent with the FPM in 2016 in order to ease the tension between LF and FPM that has lasted for years (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). LF stands firm against the atrocities of the Syrian regime and its forces and has also urged Hezbollah to abandon its activities in the Syrian civil war.

#### ***Marada Movement (Marada)***

Marada, headed by Suleiman Tony Frangieh, is a Christian political party founded in 1967 by Tony Frangieh (El Marada, n.d.). Zgharta is considered to be its main area of influence and most of its members are Maronites (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). During the civil war, they fought against the militias of the Lebanese National Movement and the Palestinians near Tripoli and Beirut (El Marada, n.d.). It is believed the military branch of Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea assassinated in 1978 Frangieh, his wife,

his three-year-old daughter along with other 30 innocent people. Suleiman Franjeh was not in Zgharta and survived the assassination (Alwaght, 2015). After 1978, the party distanced itself from the Lebanese Front. The Marada Movement's main principles focuses on: including all Lebanese in Lebanon as their final homeland, rejecting any form of partition or federation in the country, and insisting on the right of Palestinians to return with no pathway for their settlement in Lebanon. The movement was officially established in 2006. Marada believes in three core components of Lebanon: The army, the resistance, and the nation (Alwaght, 2015). It currently has a special relationship with Hezbollah and the Assad regime (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). In 2020, The US sanctioned former Public Works and Transportation minister Youssef Fenianos, a senior member of the Marada movement (Agencies and TOI staff, 2020). Suleiman responded by stating: "we never were or will be shy about our position, which we are openly proud of"(Agencies and TOI staff, 2020). The movement is currently allied with Hezbollah and the Syrian regime.

### ***Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)***

Initially, PSP was founded in January 1949 by six individuals all of different confessional backgrounds of whom the most notable was Kamal Jumblatt (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). The party was founded on secular and socialistic principles though most of its supporters are from the Druze religion (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). PSP has been a strong proponent of the Palestinian quest against Israeli occupation (14 March, 2017). After Kamal Jumblatt's assassination in 1977 gunned down by two men in what seemed to be Syrian special uniforms (The Irish Times, 2005), the party

leadership was inherited by Kamal Jumblatt's son, Walid Jumblatt (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). It was part of the Lebanese National Front among other parties that confronted the Lebanese Christian Front during the 1975 civil war in Lebanon. He led his militias, like several other parties, during the civil war and up until the Taif agreement, when they demilitarized. The Syrian regime, headed by President Hafiz Al Assad at that time, sought to control the new PSP leader which seemed to work until his son, Bashar Al Assad inherited his father and started stripping away some of the powers Jumblatt was given by Hafiz Al Assad (Encyclopedia, 2021b). Jumblatt along with Rafik Al Hariri, who was the former head of the Future Movement, then started becoming vocal against the Syrian regime. Jumblatt started asking for the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon. Following the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination, Jumblatt became a key player in the March 14 alliance which mainly formed the opposition (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). Jumblatt, referring the Assad regime reach and power in Lebanon, has seen his own death stating: "Somewhere, on the road to Beirut, or I don't know where, there will be unknown individuals, men of the shadows, waiting in ambush to spray you with bullets or detonate an explosive charge" (The Irish Times, 2005).

### ***Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)***

SSNP was originally founded in 1932 as an underground movement at the American University of Beirut by Antoun Saade who was raised in South America and was an Orthodox Christian (Adel Beshara, 2013). First, they considered that Lebanon, with both Christians and Muslims, shared with Syria a common national outlook up until the French declared it as a distinct political entity (Adel Beshara, 2013). Second, they



wanted to build an independent secular state in Syria (which for them included Lebanon) through political reform to promote national and political integration (Adel Beshara, 2013). Third, they wanted the creation of an “Arab Front” that could stand against foreign ambitions and power (Adel Beshara, 2013). An Arab front is an alliance with other Arab countries rather than an Arab Nation (Adel Beshara, 2013). Hence, it advocated for the unification of the Fertile Crescent which included Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and Cyprus. Antoun Saade, the so called father of Greater Syria, was executed in 1949 by the Lebanese authorities within 48 hours after a failed coup d’état against the Lebanese state (ExecutedToday, 2015). He was delivered to the Lebanese authorities by the Syrian military dictator Husni al-Za’im as he was seeking support in Syria (ExecutedToday, 2015). Eventually, the party was involved in the Lebanese civil war as part of the national movement. Afterwards, it supported the presence of Syrian forces on Lebanese territories and consequently supports Hezbollah and Syrian regime today (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018). It is currently headed by its President Fares Saad (National News Agency, 2019) and is currently seeking to rebrand and better unify the party under reformist agendas to promote secularism in Lebanon (Preston, 2021).

### **Data Collection Process**

In the first stage of the research, I explored available literature and recent studies on Syrian refugees’ influx to Lebanon and the understanding of main Lebanese political groups towards Syrian refugees since the on-going 2011 Syria crisis spill-over. The literature broadened my knowledge on historic grievances, refugees crises and politics, and different tacit identity groups.

In the second stage of the research, my aim was to interview the spokesperson or representative of the 10 key political party leaders/spokespersons on the Syrian refugee crisis and their party's respective position on the matter. This research phase also included administering a questionnaire to those party's constituents to get both perspectives and to shed light on any differences between the perspectives of each group.

### ***Population and Sample***

The participants of this research study consists of the heads of political parties or their assigned spokesperson/representative and their constituents. Those parties and their representative/spokesperson are chosen because they represent a main Lebanese sect-based group. They have also been in politics long enough to have witnessed both the Lebanese civil war of 1975 or its repercussions and the current 2011 Syria crisis spill-over. Hence, they have experience with both Palestinian and Syrian refugees among others. The same goes for their constituents who have been on the receiving end supporting the socio-political and economic agendas of their political representatives.

Each political party leader officials was contacted through their communications officer or available line of communication to check whether they were willing to participate in the research study. They were asked for an alternative representative in case they are unable to take part in this study for personal or security purposes. 10 constituents of each of those key parties were targeted through purposive snowball sampling with the aim of getting to the constituents before interviewing their political spokesperson so that they wouldn't influence their constituents responses in the questionnaire administered.

Snowball sampling was intentionality geared towards demographic variation in the respondents' religion, age, and gender to encompass a wider, inclusive perspective.

As requirements for the questionnaire, participants needed to hold a Lebanese nationality, be at least 23 of age, and represent females and males as equally as possible. Also, they should have voted in the last 2018 parliamentary elections. Ideally, some will be members of those key political parties holding a political party ID and others will not officially be registered as active members of the party, but would still choose to vote for this party in elections. This way I can maximize my outreach.

### ***Interview***

Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted for this research. This gave room for flexibility to ask open ended questions, follow-up on interesting answers, observe non-verbal cues, and/or rephrase a line of inquiry based on the flow of the interview which took around 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews required careful preparations, getting permissions, scheduling, and other time planning and budgeting. Once the data were collected, it was translated to English if it was conducted in Arabic and then transcribed. Interviews required professional skills and ethical considerations to overcome the lack of standardization that raises reliability concerns and any personal biases (Robson, 2016, p. 286). Interviews were audio-recorded, semi-structured and included identical questions about the party's background, general refugee crisis understanding, previous experiences with refugees, changes in refugee perception, and policy recommendations. Initially, all interviews were to be made in person; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interview were conducted through phone.

Unfortunately, only 8 out of the 10 interviews were administered. Those 2 missing interviews are a representation of the position of the 2 Shia political parties. This was complemented for with extensive research of those party's latest stated positions and other scholars' interviews to form a solid position for those parties.

### ***Questionnaire***

The specific questions of the questionnaire were designed to help answer my research question. Respondents interpreted the question and accordingly answered based on their own knowledge and experience to form judgements (Robson, 2016, p. 258). Generally, the highest response rate makes it more likely that the sample is representative and helps offset non-response bias (Robson, 2016, p. 259). 187 respondents were recorded. Of those, 127 were included in this research based on the criteria of selection chosen for this research. A minimum of 10 for each political party were selected as long as they answered the question about their political affiliation up until the last parliamentary elections of 2018. Unfortunately, for the Marada party, I could only include 4 respondents instead of 10. Respondents were asked to give their opinion on refugees and its historical significance to Lebanon. They were also asked to give their opinion as to whether Syrian refugees have triggered grievances and whether they thought their party representatives are addressing grievances related to the Syrian refugee crisis. In addition, respondents were asked about their personal reaction to the increase in the number of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon to highlight their personal experiences and general understanding towards refugees.

### ***Ethical and Contextual Considerations***

The Institutional Review Boards (IRB) rules, regulations, and procedures were followed throughout this research. A bilingual statement to ensure the informed consent (English and Arabic) was given and explained at the beginning of each interview and questionnaire. The informed consent language document depended on the participants' comfort and language of preference in exploring the research question. Interview participants were briefed about the voluntary nature of the interview which gives them the choice of withdrawal at any point during the study. At the beginning of both the interview and the questionnaire, they will be asked for their consent to use their name and party ID in the research. No identifying factors will be included in the research in order to protect participants' physical and emotional security.

The researcher personally conducted the interviews and questionnaires and has access to the collected data. There was also the option of going through the interview questions by back and forth e-mail if it worked best for the interviewee. This was the case with Tashnag party. There was a small chance of hard copy questionnaires being completed. This was the case for 14 participants who refused to administer the questionnaire online and preferred to send me pictures of their hard copy response.

Online data are stored on my Qualtrics account and can be accessed only by me. E-mails and phone numbers and other contact information of participants, obtained through the researcher reaching out to potential participants about interest in the study, are secured with the researcher. While digital information (more so for e-mails than phone numbers) are difficult to destroy, I used my secure GMU account to communicate

with participants. I am the only person to have access to participants' phone numbers. E-mails, phone numbers, and other contact information were deleted once data are collected from individual participants. Interviews were conducted online at a private space/location where others cannot overhear the conversation. Personal data traveler, an external hard drive, that is well-protected by a password will be used to store data. The data itself will be encrypted and the study ID Key will be stored separately from the study data. There are no known long-term negative consequences results for participation in this study.

This research has received approval on May 22, 2020 from the IRB under Project Number: 1573408-1. Data collection took place over a span of approximately 6 months.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the information and data collected, I used qualitative research methods. Those included interviews and questionnaires along with primary literature review in order to support my analysis and the triangulation of the data I analyzed.

After *translating* and *transcribing* all the data collected to English, I analyzed the data through *thematic analysis*. Thematic analysis is used as a *constructionist method* “which examines the way in which events, realities, meanings, and experiences, are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Robson, 2016, p. 407). Therefore, thematic analysis looks into clusters/themes to highlight patterns or trends; while still applying a clear epistemological position that can articulately answer the research question. It is a flexible approach that works well with our study since it engages with peoples’ experiences, understanding, representation, and construction of meaning to provide a rich account of the data collected.

*Coding* was central to the analysis of the data collected. Each political party was numbered by the above listed order from 1 to 10 and representatives of those parties were coded by the number of their party followed by alphabetical letters “a” and consecutively followed by “b” and so on. I used an *inductive approach* where coded data by itself highlights key concepts and notions to emphasize peoples’ experiences and realities as an individual and as part of a collective. Those concepts, notions, or descriptive ideas were then grouped to create themes and sub-themes. Data were used to connect and inter-relate themes. Therefore, I will be able to compare and contrast differences and conceptual frameworks by aggregating similar codes together, and to appreciate/construct common (or different) narrative regarding the general understanding of the crisis by different Lebanese political groups. Therefore, I constructed thematic networks and made comparisons in order to generate meaning from the data collected by noting patterns, clustering, and using metaphors to help connect data with theory, comparing/contrasting, noting relations between variables, finding intervening variables between observed variables, and then moving into categorization and analysis through the theories discussed in Chapter 5.

Throughout the process, research was supported and guided by the continuous revisions of the dissertation committee that helped offset any researcher’s bias. The research findings shed light on anomalies or outliers that are less likely to be categorized and seemed more extreme in relation to other respondents’ information. As I learn more and familiarized myself with the data collected, I explain and analyze the data throughout the research and look into evidence that may give an alternative explanation to my

analysis and challenge it to strengthen my analysis.

## **Limitations**

Because of the ongoing political turmoil and struggle in Lebanon, difficulties and limitations were anticipated throughout the research. The Lebanese society considerably suffered and experienced deep and complex traumas since the 1975 civil war, to the Syrian occupation, the Hariri assassination and the subsequent series of assassinations, the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, and clashes of Nahr el Bared camp in 2007 among others.

The notion of refugees has sensitive historical significance. I understand the sensitivity of the research topic as some participants may feel threatened or uncomfortable by the nature of the research itself. Therefore, this could affect their willingness to discuss certain topics of personal sensitivity in the data collection process. Another challenge is the gathering of credible information in a highly politicized country which can go beyond stated positions of various constituencies of the Lebanese political system and their political leaders accordingly. It was also challenging to interview political party leaders as their availability and accessibility changed depending on the socio-political status in Lebanon. In addition, the new electoral law influenced peoples' understanding and access. There are people who voted for an independent who was on a political party list. Those are not included in the research. The new electoral law also meant that the diaspora could vote for the first time, but the research is limited to Lebanese residing in Lebanon. Some were eager to participate and voice their concerns, but they had not voted in the last parliamentary elections and were thus not included in



this research. In general, access to good internet and phone coverage to participate in the interview and online questionnaire is always challenging. Those who did not have access to internet or a smart phone could not answer the questionnaire. Those who physically filled the questionnaire and sent it to me still needed a smart phone to do that.

These might have been my research's limitations hadn't it been for the COVID-19 limitation on in person interviews and interactions for which I had to redefine my means of communications with participants, the peoples' movement in Lebanon more widely known as the October 17 where Lebanese took the streets demanding all the political elites to leave positions of power and corruption, the largest non-nuclear explosion of the 21st century in Beirut on August 4, 2020 as a result of the Government's negligence and mismanagement, and the current inflation with the Lebanese lira exchange rate where 10,000 Lebanese Liras are now equivalent to 1 dollar instead of its previous value fixed at 1,500 Lebanese Liras to 1 dollar.

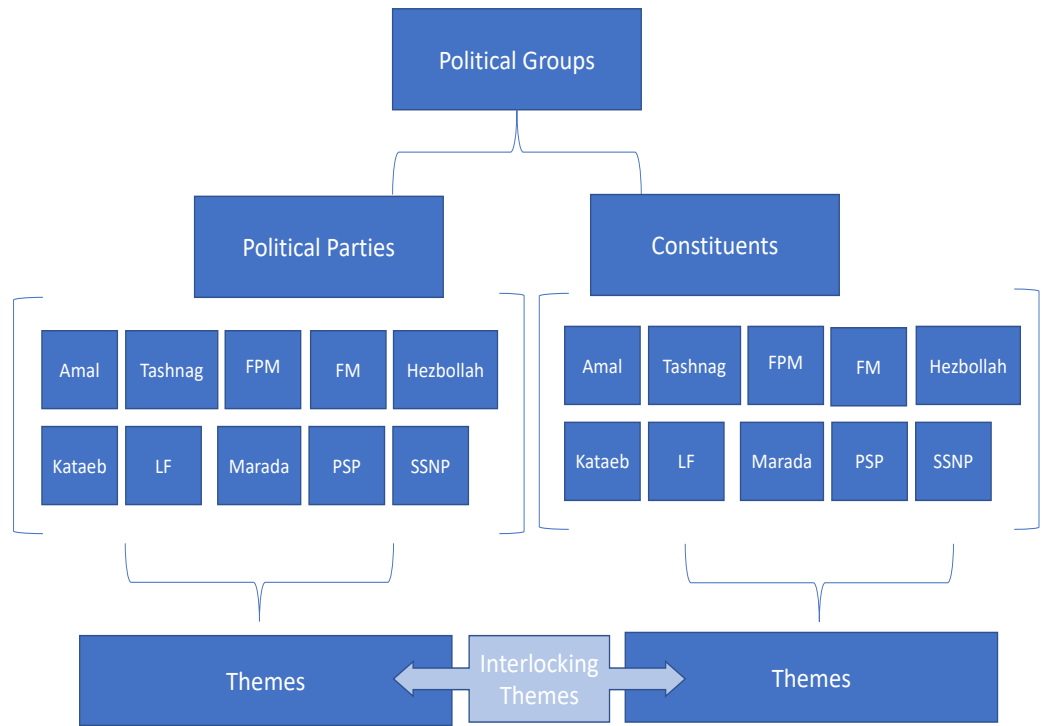
## **CHAPTER SEVEN – RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Results and Analysis**

Research on the general understanding of the Syrian Refugee Crisis from the perspective of political groups has yielded several perspectives from the different political parties and their constituents respectively. The following is the framework representing my line of thought in my analysis, a summation of the quantitative data, key themes and sub-themes noted for the party spokesperson and those of the constituents, and a concluding comprehensive analysis and interpretation of those results.

### ***Framework and Thought Process***

In order to analyze the data I collected, I went through a thought process that framed my research question and consequently my thematic analysis. Political parties, as previously defined are “groups encompassing those elected officials, who ran for elections with the support of traditional political parties, and those affiliated to the political parties they represent have the power to address, or not to address, the crisis”. Those political groups thus encompass political parties and their constituents. Themes were then generated from political parties interviewed followed by themes from the questionnaire respondents who are not homogeneous in nature and have various perspectives towards their understanding to the crisis and the reasons why they voted for a specific party. Some of these themes overlap and others are quite different.



**Figure 6**  
*Framework and Thought Process*

### *Summation of Data*

The following is the summation of the data listing party representatives interviewed and taking a closer look to the data on the questionnaire’s respondents.

#### *Political Party’s Representative Interviewed*

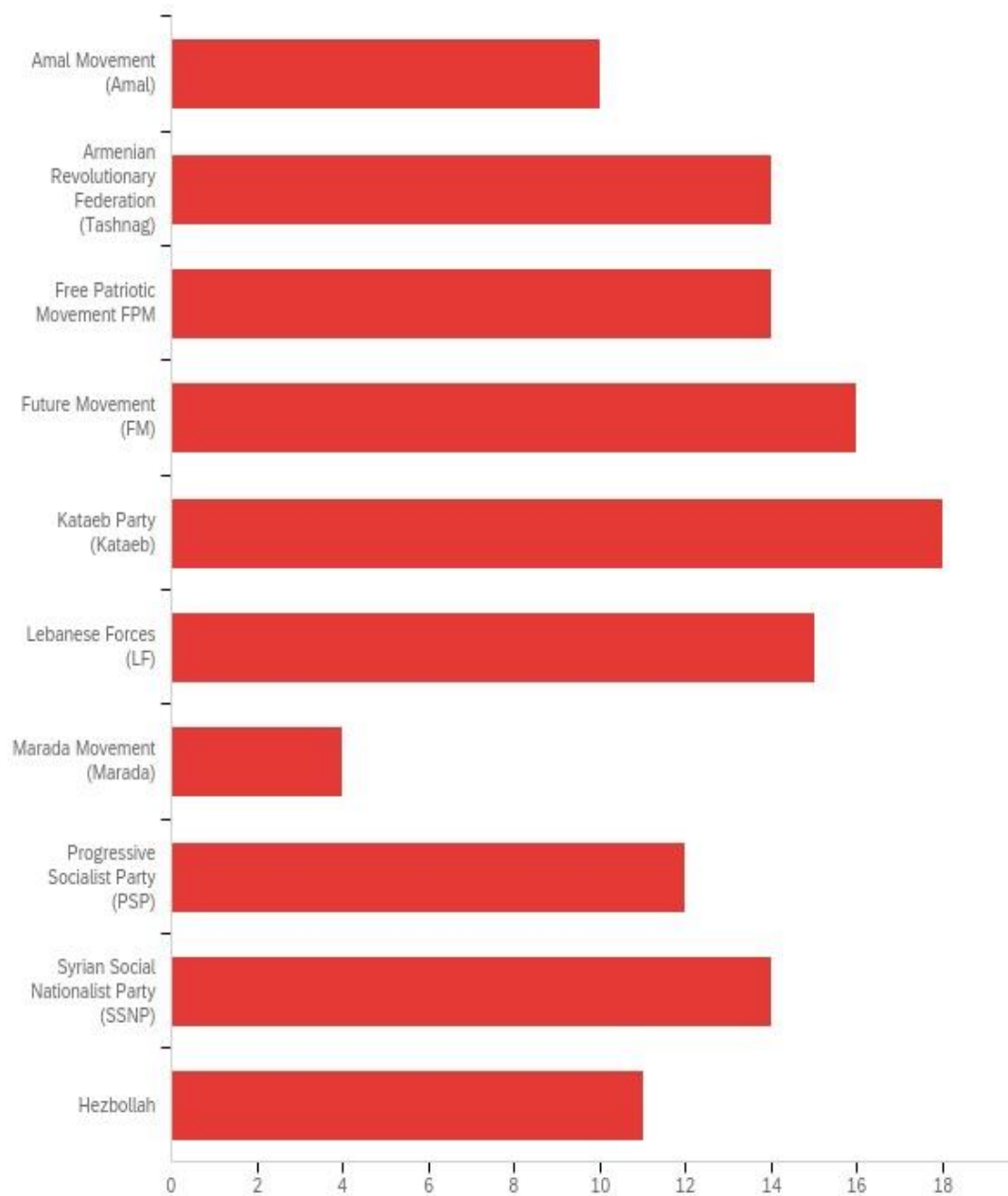
For the purpose of this research, I aimed to interview 10 political parties which I saw as playing a crucial role in the Lebanese political arena and representing various sects. Those are in alphabetical order and are the following: Amal Movement (Amal), Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tashnag), Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Future

Movement (FM), Hezbollah, Kataeb Party (Kataeb), Lebanese Forces (LF), Marada Movement (Marada), Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). I was able to interview 8 of those political parties. Unfortunately, after several attempts to reach out to Hezbollah and Amal, there was no response. Still, I believe in their crucial role in the current Syrian Refugee Crisis, especially Hezbollah as explained in the previous chapters. I therefore include their perspective from online media and other scholarly sources whenever possible and applicable.

#### *Respondents to the Questionnaire*

Respondents to the questionnaire represent the constituents of the 10 political parties who I previously established as key players in the Lebanese political arena. The data solely express the views of each respondent. Those contribute to my wider understanding of their perspective towards the Syrian Refugee crisis. The minimum required age was 23 which meant that the respondent was 21 in 2018 and was able to vote in the 2018 parliamentary elections. As will be depicted, gender was taken into account to make sure voices were not only representing one gender or the other. Some preferred not share their gender. Some respondents no longer viewed themselves as constituents of the party they had voted for in 2018. This will also be reflected in the data shared below. Similar to the quest of having 10 interviews, I aimed to target a minimum of 10 constituents for each party. In some cases, I received more respondents that initially targeted and in one case, which is the Marada movement, I received less. After careful consideration, I decided to include all respondents as long as they have noted what political party they were affiliated with up until the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary

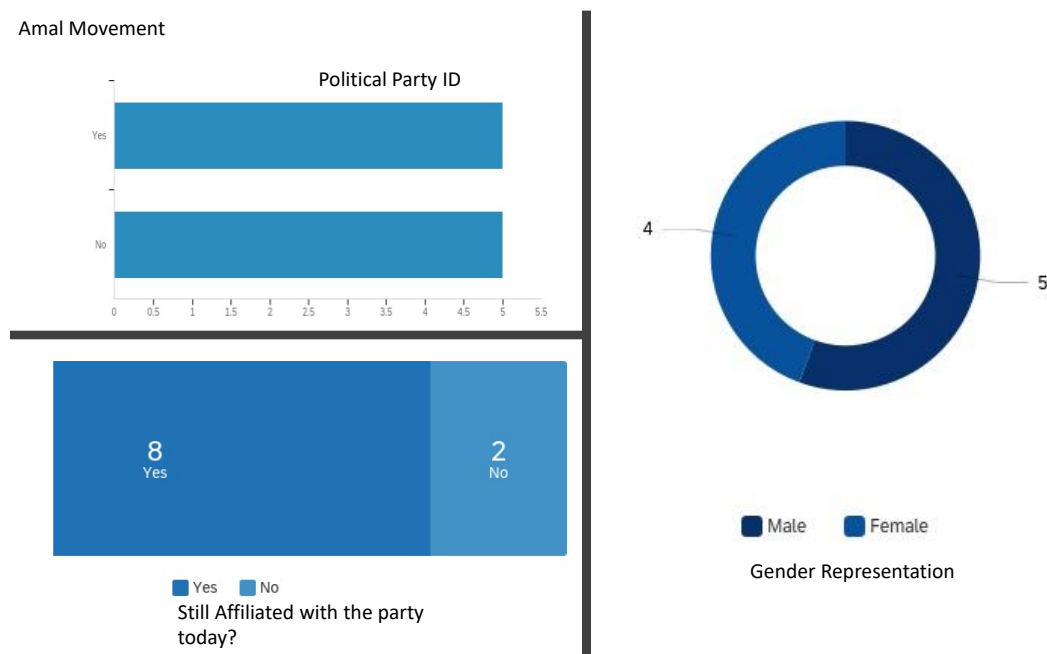
elections along with the initial established criteria of being a Lebanese living in Lebanon, not less than 23 years old, and have voted in the 2018 parliamentary elections. I received 187 respondents of which 127 are included in this research.



**Figure 7**

*General Respondents' Response to their Political Affiliation up until the 2018 Elections*

## Amal Movement



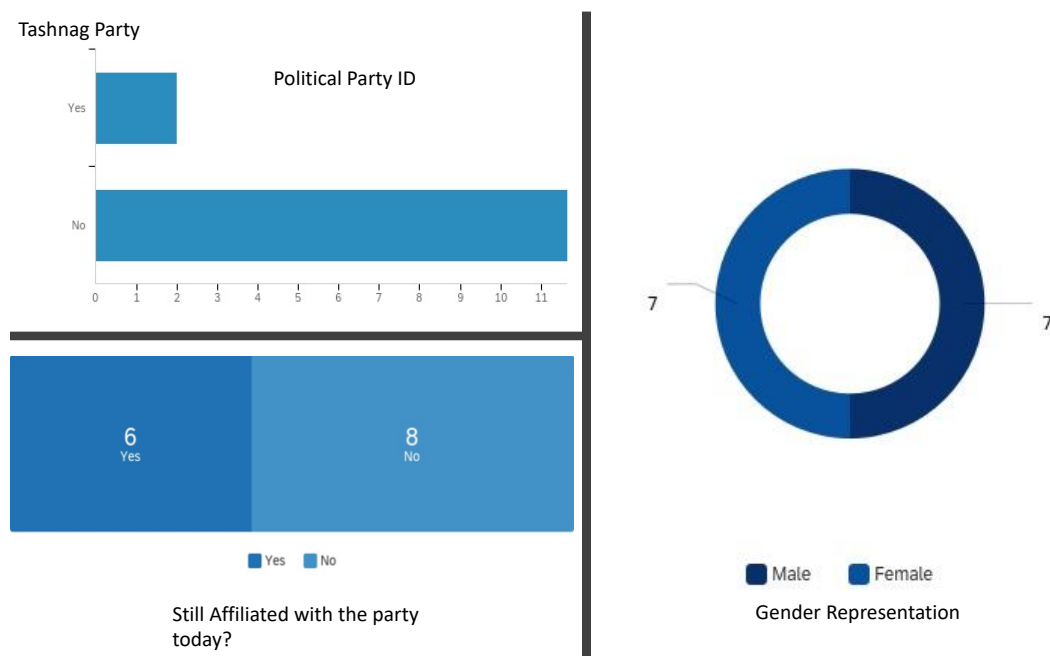
**Figure 8**

*Amal Movement Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

Amal movement respondents totaled 10. From those 10 respondents, 5 were male and 4 were female. 1 person did not respond to the gender question. Their ages ranged from 25 to 56 years old. While 3 stated they were Muslim, others specified that they were Shia Muslim. As depicted in figure 8, 5 carried a party ID card while the other 5 claimed did not. 2 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the Amal movement. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because they believe in the “raison d’être of the party”, “share similar beliefs, principles, and goals”, the feeling of belonging, it “secures a job”, and because their loyalty to their religion and the head of Amal movement stating: “my first loyalty is for my religion and Nabih Berri who

protects my religion”. Others characterized the party as “not sectarian like another parties,” in that “they always seek to get the rights of the weak and dispossessed”.

### Armenian Revolutionary Front (Tashnag)



**Figure 9**

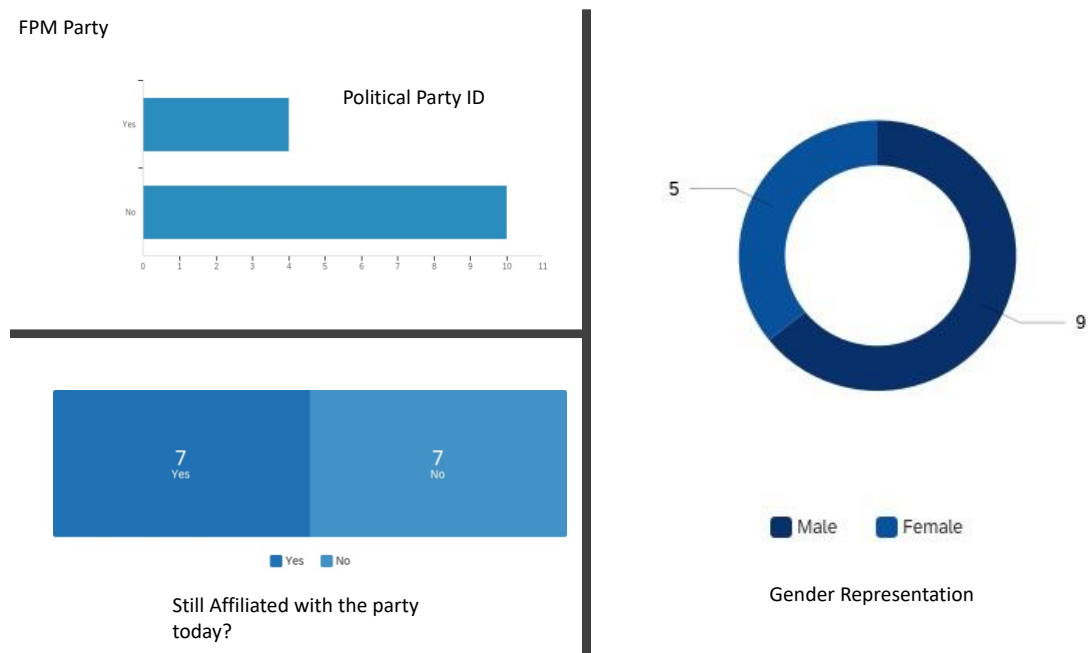
*Tashnag Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

Tashnag party respondents totaled 14. From those 14 respondents, 7 were male and 7 were female. Their ages ranged from 24 to 68 years old. While 9 stated they were Christian, others specified that they were Orthodox Armenian. As depicted in figure 9, 2 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 8 of the respondents claim they



are no longer affiliated today with the Tashnag Party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because they believe in the “best interest of their community”, work for “their people”, and having family history with the party. Others considered that the party did not “deliver on their promises”, “nothing changed”, and they realize they do not need to follow their parent’s party membership.

### Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)

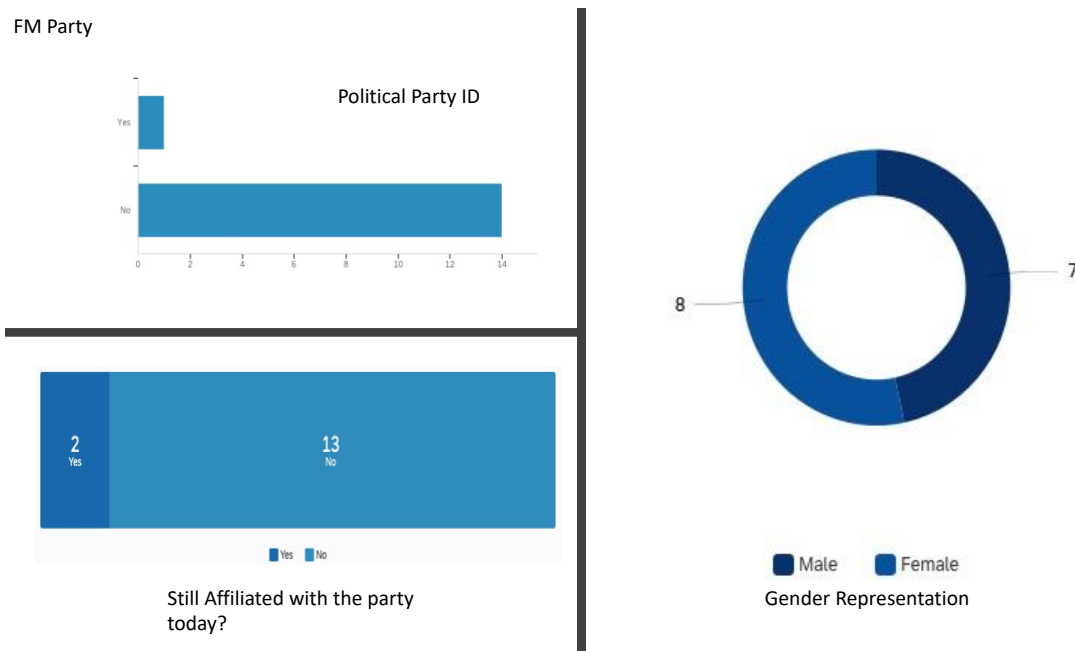


**Figure 10**

*Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

FPM party respondents totaled 14. From those 14 respondents, 5 were male and 9 were female. Their ages ranged from 29 to 65 years old. While 10 stated they were Christian, two specified that they were Maronite Christian, 1 was Shia Muslim, and 1 was Catholic Christian. As depicted in figure 9, 4 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 7 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the FPM Party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because they believe they are “the best between all parties”, “no better alternative” or the fact that head of the party Gebran Bassil and President Aoun are being attacked all over the media reaffirms that they are “innocent and fighting against that corrupt system led by warlords”. Those who are no longer supporters mostly considered that the party “has failed to stop corruption and has failed to deliver on its electoral promises”, “many of its figures were involved in corrupt actions”, and that just like other parties they are only looking to divide the country’s resources amongst themselves.

#### Future Movement (FM)



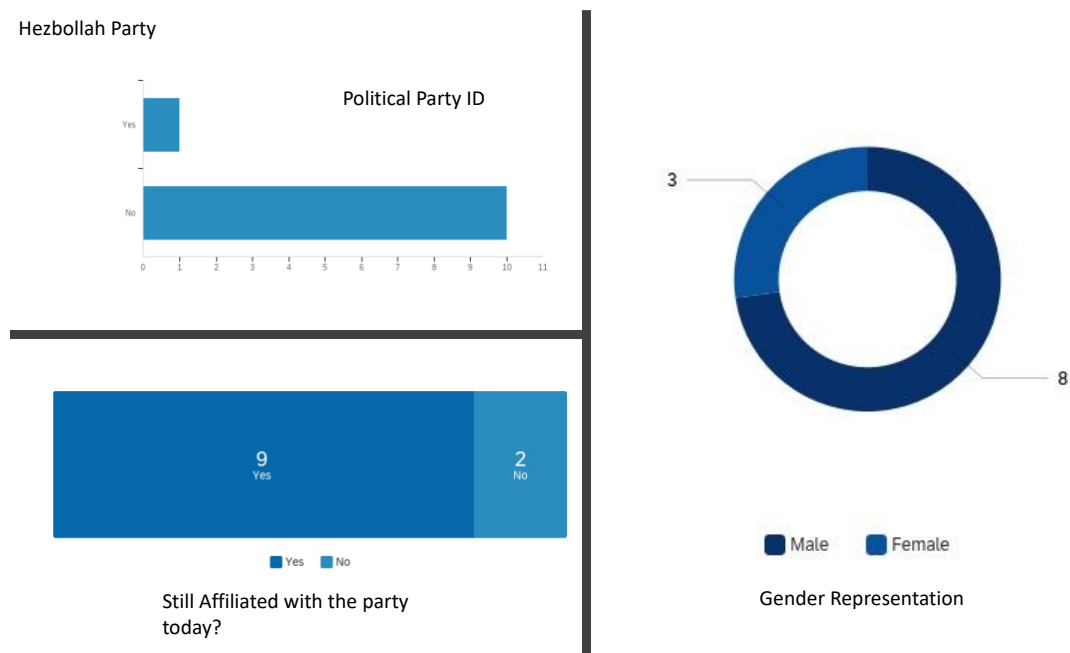
**Figure 11**

*FM Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

FM party respondents totaled 15. From those 15 respondents, 7 were male and 8 were female. Their ages ranged from 23 to 50 years old. While 7 stated they were Muslim, 7 specified that they were Sunni Muslims, and 1 was Druze. As depicted in figure 11, 1 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 13 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the FM Party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because it “protects their religion” and because they believe in the party’s “program and vision”. Those who are no longer supporters explain that the party no longer represents them, they see it as “corrupt”, none “cares about people or Lebanon”, “because all political parties are lying to the people”, and one

respondent stated that “after the revolution I changed and after Beirut explosion I changed more and more I want a civil government with no corruption” in reference to the October 17 movement and the August 4 blast in Beirut.

### Hezbollah



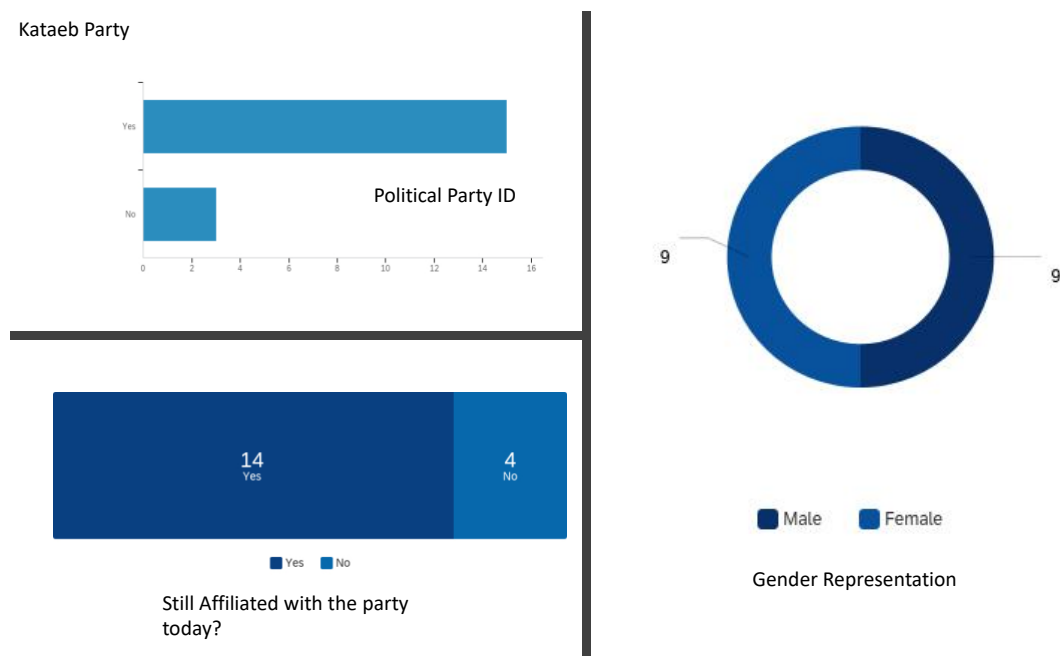
**Figure 12**

*Hezbollah Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

Hezbollah party respondents totaled 11. From those 11 respondents, 8 were male and 3 were female. Their ages ranged from 26 to 60 years old. While 7 stated they were Muslim, the rest specified that they were Shia Muslim. As depicted in figure 12, 1 carried

a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 2 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with Hezbollah Party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because they believe they are their protectors especially in the south where they have firsthand felt the aggression of the Israeli enemy, and that “resistance” is “the only guarantee” for one’s family’s safety. Those who are no longer supporters stated that they no longer represented them or that they do not really see them “work for the country”.

### Kataeb Party (Kataeb)

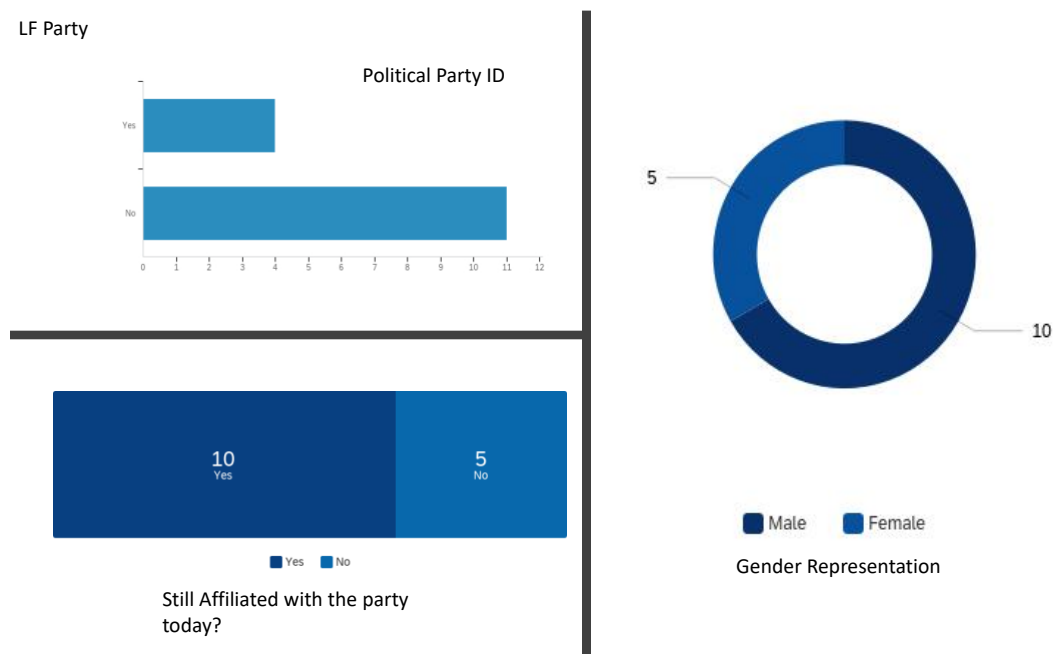


**Figure 13**

*Kataeb Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

Kataeb party respondents totaled 18. From those 18 respondents, 9 were male and 9 were female. Their ages ranged from 24 to 55 years old. While 10 stated they were Christians, 6 specified that they were Maronite Christian, and 2 were Catholic Christians. As depicted in figure 13, 15 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 4 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the Kateb Party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to do so because it represents their “beliefs”, is “honest” with its people, has a “clear project”, and “aims towards a peaceful, prosperous and independent Lebanon”, “the only political party that truly cares about Lebanon” “opposition and it was part of the revolution that started in 17 October 2019”, and “believe that Hezbollah's manifesto negates the formation of a strong state and rule of law”. Those who are no longer supporters stated that they no longer represented them or that they no longer believed in political party work in Lebanon.

### Lebanese Forces (LF)



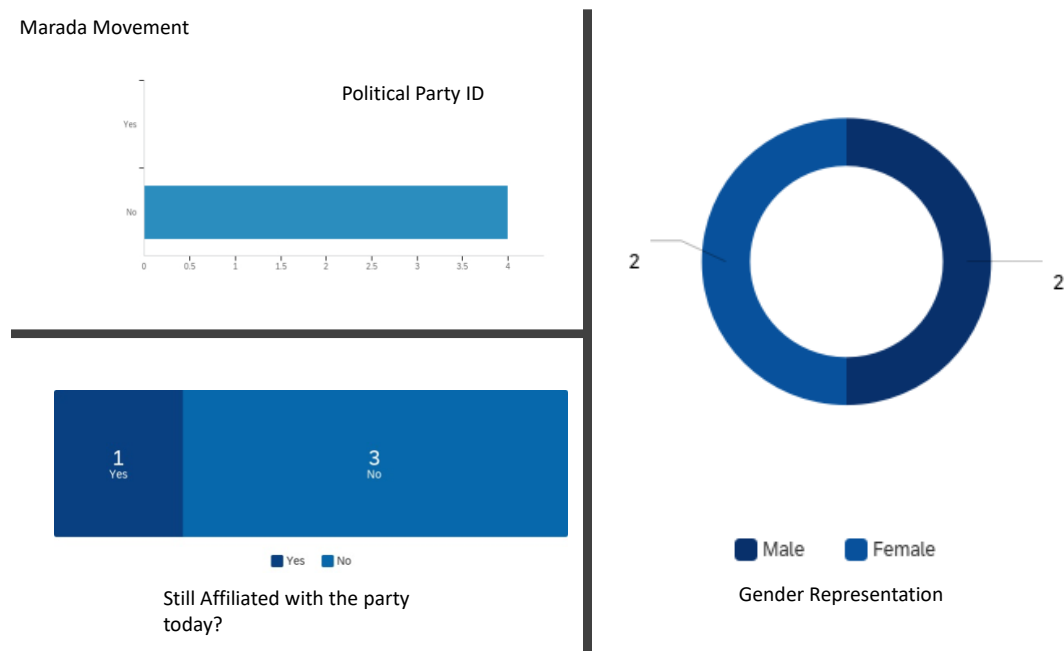
**Figure 14**

*LF Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

LF party respondents totaled 15. From those 15 respondents, 10 were male and 5 were female. Their ages ranged from 23 to 63 years old. While 13 stated they were Christian, 1 person specified Maronite Christian and another person specified Catholic Christian. As depicted in figure 14, 4 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 5 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the Lebanese Forces Party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because the party represents their “values”, “dream” of an “independent” Lebanon under the “rule of law”, and the “only party working for the best of the Lebanese people without stealing their money and their future as well”. Those who are no longer supporters stated that they did

not see any “achievement” since electing them, it is the “only party working for the best of the Lebanese people without stealing their money and their future as well”, and that they have been in Government since 2005, but have never come forward with names of corrupt personnel stating that “they were in the government since 2005 and they didn’t talk about corrupt people until now”.

### Marada Movement (Marada)



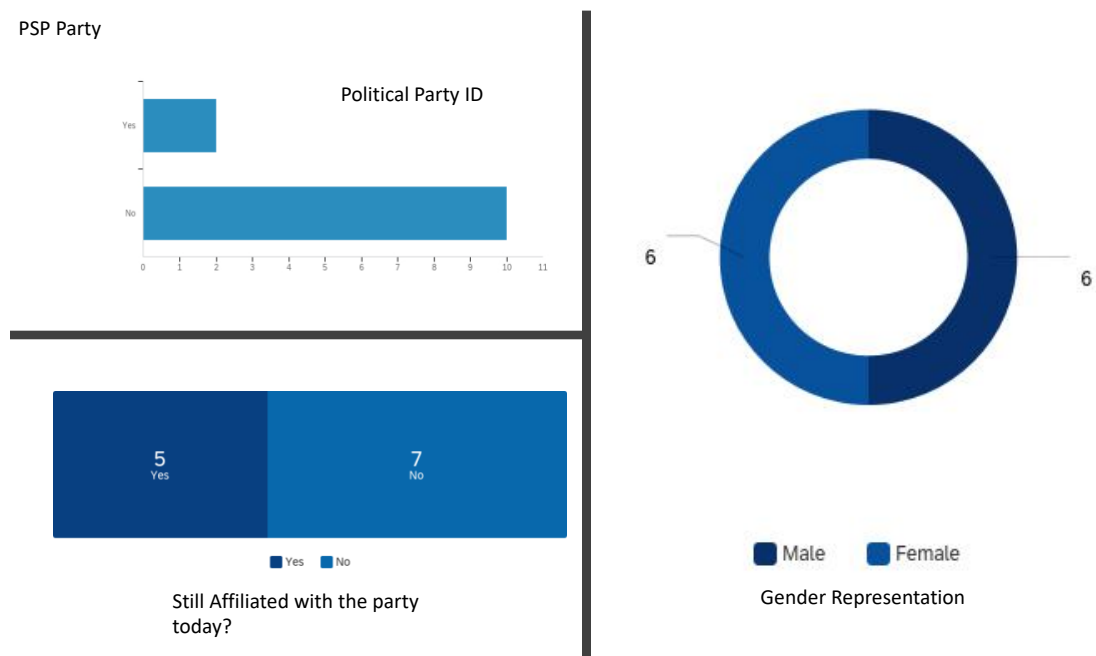
**Figure 15**

*Lebanese Forces Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*



Marada party respondents totaled 4. From those 4 respondents, 2 were male and 2 were female. Their ages ranged from 30 and 38 years old. While 3 stated they were Christian, 1 considered himself simply Lebanese above all religions. As depicted in figure 15, they claimed they did not carry any party ID. 3 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the Marada Movement. The one still a supporter of the party claim to be so because of being convinced in their “goal and vision”. Those who are no longer supporters stated that the party did not fit their “expectations” and because all political parties need internal reform and have been somehow involved, over the years, in the current socio-economic deteriorating situation in Lebanon.

### Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)



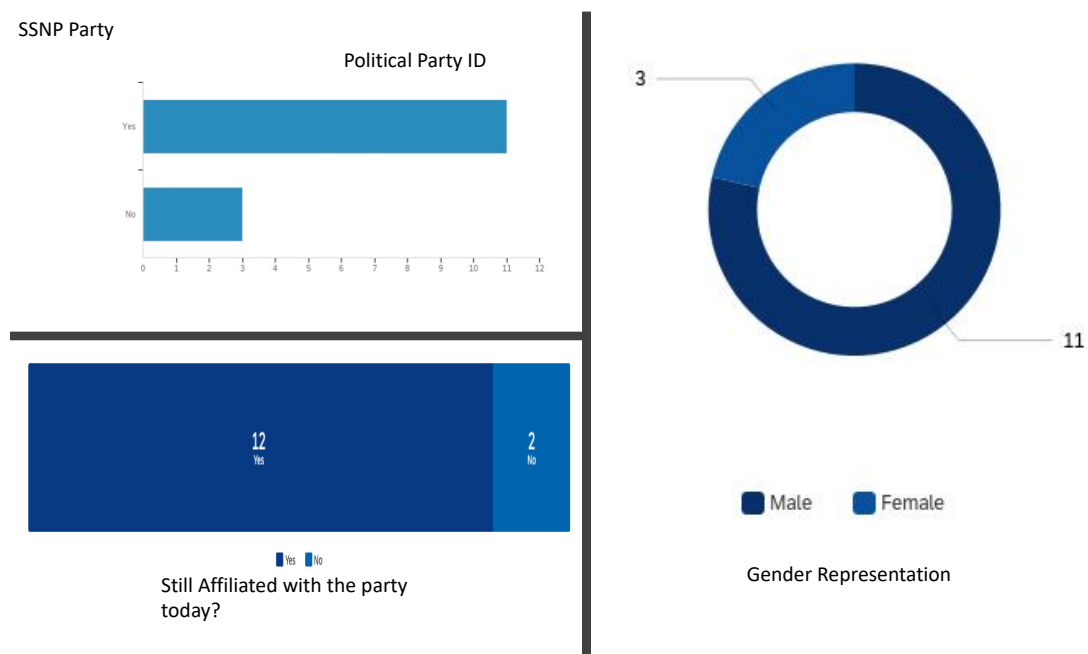
**Figure 16**

*PSP Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

PSP party respondents totaled 12. From those 12 respondents, 6 were male and 6 were female. Their ages ranged from 29 to 60 years old. While all stated they were Druze, 1 sated Muslim. As depicted in figure 16, 3 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 7 of the respondents claim they are no longer affiliated today with the PSP party. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because they represent them, they believe in their “approach and goals” on the social and political front, and because it runs in the family from “the father of my grandfather”, it “defends the oppressed and the poor”, and it defended us during the civil war and the Israeli occupation so we could “remain in our homes”. Those who are no longer supporters

stated that they are “no longer supporters”, joined the “revolution” in reference to the October 17 movement, and because “all political parties are corrupt”.

### Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)



**Figure 17**

*SSNP Party Gender, ID holder, and Affiliation today.*

SSNP party respondents totaled 14. From those 14 respondents, 11 were male and 3 were female. Their ages ranged from 23 to 54 years old. While 4 stated they were Druze, 2 stated were Muslims, 1 was Chaldean Christian, 1 did not “practice religion”, and the rest refused to answer the question given the party’s ideology. As depicted in

figure 17, 11 carried a party ID card while the others claimed did not. 12 of the respondents claim they are still affiliated with the SSNP party today. Those who are still supporters of the party claim to be so because they believe in their “mission and vision”, represents their “convictions”, “because the party is the only solution to deliver the country from all crises”, it believes in a greater Nation or “Umma” (in this case Greater Syria as explained in Chapter 6), and because their “ideology” is the “practical solution” to the problems of Lebanon and the region. Those who are no longer supporters stated that they no longer represented them or that they do not really see them “work for the country”.

In conclusion, respondents to this questionnaire are not homogeneous. They each have their own perspective and their own voice whether they still are affiliated to the party they voted for in the last 2018 parliamentary elections or whether they are no longer affiliated to them. The questionnaire has captured a wide range of age and captured the perspective of both female and male with the exceptions of those who decided not to answer this question. It is noteworthy to highlight that most of those who responded do not have a political party ID which is less common in Lebanon amongst constituents holding strong opinions of the parties they vote for. Parties with a larger political ID card number were mostly sought through the Party’s spokesperson which is why they all carry the ID. Unfortunately, it was harder to reach the Marada constituents, though I reached out to their communications bureau and was able to interview their spokesperson. I still believe the data collected in that regard serve as a valuable contribution to the general understanding of the Syrian Refugee Crisis from the perspective of Lebanese political

groups. The results show the diversity of the Lebanese fabric and the layers of complexity influencing the subject matter.

***Political Parties: Key Themes and Sub-themes***

***Categorizing Syrians Seeking Refuge***

*“They are displaced not refugees. I am talking about the Syrians displaced.  
Palestinians are refugees.”  
-SSNP Interview*

**Theme #1- Categorizing Syrians Seeking Refuge**

**Description:** Political party leaders have categorized Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon as refugees, migrants, or displaced persons.

Political parties have categorized Syrians who have sought refuge in Lebanon into different identity groups. There seems to be no single identity-category in terms of which all Syrians are placed. Are they migrant workers, refugees, or displaced? There is no consensus on the subject matter. This brings us to a key struggle in terms of defining Syrians in order to frame the issue at stake and work on substantive strategies in the refugee response plan or contribute to a migration policy.

The Future Movement’s (FM) representative has clarified the tug of war on the terminology itself by referring to the context in Lebanon. According to the spokesperson: “We keep on calling them displaced even if they cross the borders simply because if you define them as refugees then Lebanon has to respect some international agreements regarding refugees”. The Progressive Socialist Party approves of this explanation and elaborates by stating that it is sectarian considerations that did not allow Lebanon to sign

the 1951 Geneva Convention. Still, throughout the interview, FM representative referred to Syrians as refugees. Both the Lebanese forces and the Kataeb Party also called them refugees throughout the interview. The same designation was affirmed by the PSP spokesperson who stated that “regardless of the identity of the refugees, if they were Muslim Sunnis or Christians or whatever, a refugee is a refugee”. An interesting view point is that of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tashnag) spokesperson, who claimed that they themselves have been historically displaced and consequently understand what it is like to be a refugee in reference to Syrian refugees in Lebanon today. The Tashnag representative reflected on the party’s own history of being refugees and the way they organized cultural, educational, and political institutions to help support dispersed Armenians in multiple countries. Hence, the Tashnag representative continue to state that “we understand the needs of all refugees, and we do our best to support them” because the quest of a “homeland” is so dear to their hearts.

The Free Patriotic Movement representative (FPM) considered most Syrians in Lebanon to be migrant workers who are making money under the pretext of being a refugee, based on a strategy of receiving dollars in aid without paying any taxes while competing with the local labor market. The spokesperson stated that those Syrians were not refugees because they are going back and forth into their country, which means that they are not fleeing persecution. Meanwhile, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) spokesperson and the Marada movement (Marada) spokesperson considered the Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon displaced and clearly differentiated between Palestinians categorized as refugees and Syrians categorized as displaced. They explained

that the Syrians have a land in the sense of a community/village to go back to in comparison to Palestinians who have been in Lebanon for a long time and are unable to go back to their homes because of the Israeli occupation. Therefore, categorizing Syrians as refugees, migrants, or displaced is controversial and shows the clear division within the Lebanese Government and/or the opposition on categorizing refugees and managing the Syrian Refugee crisis.

It is noteworthy to state that no political party seems to have a proper count or understanding of how many Syrians are seeking refuge in Lebanon, no matter how they categorize them. FPM representative considered the number of refugees to be 2 million in the country with 4 million Lebanese in total. The FM representative spoke of a million or million and a half at the peak of the crisis of Syrian refugees' in Lebanon, and Tashnag spoke of a quarter of the Lebanese population being refugees. This confusion with data pertaining to the number of refugees is understandable after the Government lost count once it stopped registering refugees with UNHCR as of May 2015 and no official statistics are present.

#### *Non-refoulement v/s Non-settlement*

*“There are those who want to send them away at any cost and who will blame them for all Lebanese problems and on the other hand those who want to keep them at any price and those who want to abuse their presence in favor of their own political gains.” - LF Interview*

#### **Theme #2- Non-Refoulement v/s Non-Settlement**

**Description:** Representatives are divided between those who support the U.N. notion of non-refoulement and those who support the notion of non-settlement on Lebanese

territories.

Another key legal and moral struggle centers on the notion of non-refoulement versus the notion of non-settlement. Political parties in Lebanon have different positions in terms of implementing international refugee law regarding non-refoulement, as previously elaborated on in Chapter 2. The notion of non-refoulement, in brief, implies that no person fleeing persecution should be forcefully returned home. Political parties are divided into two camps: (a) those in support of non-refoulement and (b) those in support of non-settlement. Non-settlement means that Syrians cannot settle or take refuge freely in Lebanon until a solution for the conflict has been found. Syrians would have to settle in areas deemed as safe in Syria by certain political parties. All Lebanese political parties agree that refugees need to return home, but the question is how and at what cost for the refugees themselves.

According to the FM representative, “no one has a declared policy other than the ultimate solution should be the safe and dignified return of the refugees”. The question remains whether the waiting period which can take months or years for Syrians to go back to their homes should be in safe zones in Syria or whether they should stay for now in Lebanon until they have sufficient guarantees to go back and wait in Syria for the conflict to end. The FM representative considers that the issue of safeguarding and guaranteeing their safety when Syrians go back to their country within a massive international effort that would guarantee those rights is necessary because Syrians are scared of military conscription, of being killed, and of being imprisoned among others if



they return. It is not safe for them to just return “unless you want to oppress them and put them on boats and ship them to Europe like the Turks did”. The latter added that “there are some people who say put them in boats and send them. Racism becomes a major component”. The notion of non-refoulement has also been affirmed by the LF representative who considered that, regardless of their position towards the war in Syria, “Lebanon cannot refute/reject anyone whose life is under threat”. PSP representative continued to affirm the protection of refugees, under international law, and the notion of non-refoulement. Furthermore, the representative stated that they had initially proposed the establishment of Government controlled camps on the borders with Syria from the Lebanese side in an effort to protect refugees until there are international guarantees that would safeguard their return.

For the FPM spokesperson, “90%” of Syria is considered safe under the Assad regime and there is no reason for the Syrians to stay in Lebanon siding with the notion of non-settlement. The FMP, as a party, has been pushing the international community through the UN “to push for the return of Syrian refugees to where they are safe and don’t need to be refugees anymore”. The SSNP representative sided with the FPM representative in terms of non-settlement regarding the claim that “90%” of Syria is safe and controlled by the Assad regime. The SSNP spokesperson insisted that Syrians should go back to their own land referring to their communities, villages, and families where they would want to go back to where they were raised and where they would yearn to be buried. This is also the case with the Tashnag Party representative who stated that “we need concrete steps and discussions with the Syrian government to find a way to offer a

safe return for these refugees”. The PSP representative explained the FPM’s position on non-settlement and immediate return to Syria by stating that:

President Michel Aoun and Gebran Bassil and the parties, specifically the Free Patriotic Movement, used the politics of incitement against refugees and pressured them so that they return to Syria. They even tried to push for International aid not to be provided for them in Lebanon, but to be provided for them in Syria as a motivation for them to return there and to send aid to Syria. They considered that if aid is given for them in Lebanon, it means that the international community is encouraging them to stay in Lebanon.

It is key to note in this research that the FPM is currently Hezbollah’s ally and since the latter has been actively engaged in fighting in Syria for the Assad regime, they have used on ad-hoc basis their relationship with the Syrian regime to return Syrian refugees on a voluntarily basis which assumes that they are with the concept of non-refoulement, but not necessarily for the purpose of adhering to any international law, but because Nasrallah viewed the issue “as a major humanitarian case” (The Lebanese Center for Human Rights, 2013) . In a speech by Hezbollah leader, broadcasted on local TV channels, “Nasrallah said Hezbollah was establishing a mechanism to return “the biggest possible number” of Syrians refugees who want to go home safely and voluntarily” (Reuters Staff, 2018b). “We are ready to help ... and we will continue helping until this matter is settled politically and officially between the Lebanese and Syrian governments,” he added (Reuters Staff, 2018b). Amal movement, a keen ally to Hezbollah and FPM, has supported this stance focusing on measures to return Syrians to Syria (Xinhua, 2019).

The Marada Movement spokesperson, also assert that more than 80% of Syrian territories are now safe under the control of the Assad regime and the representative sided with the notion of non-settlement and return to Syria. The representative stated that:

It is not only their right to return to their country, but it's our right and their duty towards us to return to their country and their country showed interest in embracing them and showed support. Some Lebanese politicians say they are worried about refugees going back to Syria because of possible punishment and sanctions from their Government. Despite the humanitarian side, which is not convincing, I believe most of the ones who went back to Syria went back to their country and there were no pressures or sanctions or call it whatever you prefer.

The Kataeb party representative sided with the non-refoulement camp, but considered the need to create informal government controlled camps to manage the refugees' influx and the response plan. The representative to this party stated that:

We proposed to have Government sponsored camps on the borders between Lebanon and Syria especially in the Bekaa area where there are vast lands that are uninhabited and have a big number of refugees, and to avoid any illegal or undocumented influx of refugees into the country.

At this point the Kataeb party representative explains that they, as a party, do not want Syrians to return to their country at any cost, but that they "also don't want to wait for a political accord for them to return to Syria". The spokesperson added that since major powers, political and military, are in Syria, "we need to have safe zones inside Syria where refugees especially from Lebanon can go to these safe zones and be in Syria".

Their initial stance of non-refoulement may have thus shifted into non-settlement at this point. Hence, the Kataeb party representative continues to state that “major powers that are supporting different actors in Syria would guarantee these safe zones and the refugees would go there”. Therefore, Lebanese political parties have different opinions on the notion of non-refoulement and since the Lebanese Government is not a signatory of the 1951 convention, many believed that the notion of non-settlement is to be prioritized moving forward.

#### *Existentialist Fear and the Demographic Balance*

*“If there will be talks about naturalizations, God forbid, we will try our best to block this path, this is very dangerous in terms of demographics which is the foundation of Lebanon”.*

*-Marada Interview*

#### **Theme #3-** Existentialist Fear and the Demographic Balance

**Description:** Representatives fear that any demographic change in the country is a direct threat to their existence in a confessional system.

The question of preserving the demographic balance in the country between different sectarian groups has been recurrent over the years. The fear that one religion could take over the rights of other religions if the national pact is broken or the demographic balance is shaken has continuously lead to a government formation deadlock and conflicts within the country, as previously mentioned in Chapters 1, 2, and 4. To describe this situation, the FM representative stated that:

Most of these guys are Muslims and so there is a major concern within the Christian community which is already a minority that if some of these refugees stay, it will alter the demographics of Lebanon which is already not in balance according to them.

For the LF party representative, Lebanon is a country where refugees only transition, explaining that:

The reason why we accept and we acknowledge that we are not a country of long-term integration is that as you know the sectarian, confessional, and regional balance in Lebanon is very tricky, and thus any naturalization of large numbers will create a demographic risk and a demographic conflict in Lebanon.

This idea of sectarian, confessional and regional balance is a recurrent subject where party representatives refer to the Taef accord and the confessional structure of the Lebanese government previously explained and hinted to in Chapters 1 through 6. The spokesperson for the LF continues to say that this balance is very critical and that they will fight hard any naturalization attempt. This is clearly stated by the Marada movement spokesperson who stated that “God forbid” there are any attempts for naturalizations, be it for Palestinians and/or Syrians, they will do all what they can “to block the path” towards that. In that regard, the LF spokesperson explains that they made sure “that any nationalization law or the law that dictates how a Lebanese citizenship is acquired is something of high importance. It actually requires 2/3 approval in the government and not a simple majority”. The representative adds that the LF party constituents fear any kind of nationalization because “they have seen that the Palestinians have been here for

100 years without a possible solution. They have this in their head and they ask about it regularly”. The Tashnag party representative explained that people have “some unjustified fears of demographic or sectarian change in the country that would lead to security issues”. This is because “the issue of demographics in Lebanon is a stern one”. They continue to say that the party leaders “do not blame the refugees for this issue, it is a long standing prevailing issue in Lebanon where any demographic change is expected to open topics of integration and assimilation and changing the sectarian divisions politically in Lebanon”.

The FPM representative, whose party currently has the largest Christian parliamentary bloc in the Lebanese parliament, explained that it is not about the nationality of those seeking refuge, but “it is about the numbers and the main numbers of refugees here in Lebanon are Syrians and Palestinians”. Furthermore, the representative explained they believe that the issue of Syrian refugees is a political scheme to push for “demographic changes” in terms of nationality and not religion for which they will “face with all the means”. Though the spokesperson focused on the concept of national versus foreigner rather than Christian versus Muslim, the spokesperson also emphasized that “there are decisions that we consider necessary to keep the country as we know it today. Lebanon is a country based on very specific equilibrium and demographics and politics and constitution and the whole historic background”. He further added that their firm position against any form of naturalization is comparable to their position to the Palestinian refugees being naturalized.

We consider that we are against nationalization of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and we are with giving them their right to return to their land that has been taken away by force”. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, we refuse the nationalization of Syrians in Lebanon and keeping them here. We will defend their right to return till the end.

The SSNP representative bluntly and simply explained the demographic balance and the fear each sect has from the other by stating the following:

Christians are counting Christians, Sunnis are counting Sunnis, Shiites are counting Shiites. So, if those refugees were Shiites, the Sunnis and Christians wouldn't be happy. Same goes for the Sunnis, if the refugees were Sunnis then the Shiites and the Christians wouldn't be happy so on and so forth.

This has been affirmed by the Kataeb party representative stating that:

Some people don't want them because of demographic reasons because most of the refugees are Sunnis and Muslims. Maybe, not maybe, of course all the Christians wouldn't want them to be here for a longer time and ask for naturalization. It would change the demographic balance in Lebanon.

The Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) representative did not see refugees as a threat.

They do not believe that refugees are in Lebanon to “change demographics in Lebanon or challenge the presence of the country and its entity”. The PSP representative consequently explained how the position of parties, especially those on the right of the political spectrum, shape their positions according to the sect of the refugees, stating that “if the refugees were Muslims, they consider that those refugees threaten the confessional

equilibrium in Lebanon and they then formulate their position towards them. This is why we are out of this framework”. Although the PSP party representative considers his party out of this sectarian framework, the representative states that, as a party, they too don’t want a change in the demographic balance by the following:

Us too, we don’t want a change in the demographic reality in the country, it is not necessary, but this is not related to temporarily refugee status in Lebanon and for the refugee to live in dignity and to uphold his human dignity. This does not clash with the demographic balance in the country.

Hence, refugees “staying” in Lebanon through naturalization has been long frowned upon by different religious communities and different political factions especially when those refugees do not share the same confessional background with one of the researched, traditional political parties in this dissertation.

#### *Threat Narrative and Saving Face*

*“In the name of being a refugee, they are taking the work opportunity from the local population. They call this humanitarian. I think this is also a crime against humanity for the local population too”.*

*- FPM Interview*

#### **Theme #4-** The Perceived Threat and Saving Face

**Description:** There are clear reasons to believe that refugees are a threat to Lebanon at the economic, political, and security levels.

The perceived threat posed by the presence of the Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon is exhibited in acts of scapegoating and stigmatization of Syrian Refugees at the



economic, political, and security sectors of society. This perception is sometimes then followed with a reasoning political party leaders give to save face and explain their stance.

One of the many important challenges facing Lebanon today centers on the economy. This is increasingly the case with today's economic challenges in Lebanon. Those are mainly the following: the downfall of the Lebanese Lira from a worth of 1500 L.L. to the dollar to a rate of 10,000L.L. to the dollar. This is in addition to a wave of immigration and brain-drain from Lebanon as educated and skillful citizens seek immigration to make a better living while the country becomes poorer because of corruption and the lack of governance. Quoting the FM spokesperson: "Syrians are taking jobs in the informal sector and thus compounding the problem to the Lebanese". The Kataeb person explains that "it is cheaper to get a Syrian to work for you than a Lebanese to work for you even in skilled or non-skilled jobs- both". The Marada movement representative also spoke of the fear their constituents share and explained that their constituents thought that they "were empathetic to a portfolio whose lifespan is short, but it turned out to be long" and now they worry about the job market and the burdens on Lebanon's infrastructure. However, PSP representative and the Tashnag party representative acknowledged their constituents' fear of competition in the labor market. Nevertheless, the refugees are needed for work because, as the PSP spokesperson put it, "there are jobs in Lebanon that no one would work in except the refugees or the displaced" and this had been traditionally the case in construction and agriculture. The FPM representative had a firm stance on the subject matter of Syrian refugees and was

against being labeled and treated as a racist by political parties who consider that the FPM is not putting the safety of the refugees first when they ask for their return. The FPM spokesperson stated that:

We are participating in turning our own population, the people of the land, the people that were born, raised, and that have been here forever to refugees in their own country. This impacts the economy and labor markets considering Lebanon is not a developed country and the infrastructure is already under pressure.

Everything that is related to the infrastructure: electricity, water, etc. That burden can't be handled by any economy in the world.

The FPM representative further explained that the situation deteriorated in Lebanon “not only because of refugees, but also because of refugees”. The FPM spokesperson stated that whenever they asked for strict rules and regulations in governing refugees, they have been called “racist, inhumane, and against international humanitarian rights”. Still, he states that “our population has rights like everywhere in the world to preferential rights to everyone else”. Furthermore:

Those who consider that we are racist need and education. They need to go back to college in order to understand the rules and regulations everywhere in the world. If this is racism, then all countries in the world are racist.

To explain the resentment of local communities, the Kataeb party also mentioned the issue of international donations that support refugees with blankets, fuel for heating, and free education, while the host community in Akkar for example and other remote

areas are not able to afford those. The spokesperson added that because of this resentment between host communities and refugees, sometimes

villages kicked all the refugees because of 1 crime committed by 1 person and this person happened to be a refugee; so they kick all the refugees from these areas and these are in the South and in the North it's not like it happened in Mount Lebanon or in Beirut. It happened in remote areas, in rural areas.

Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon are also being used as a political tool.

According to the SSNP spokesperson, those who are not returning to Syria are being used as a political tool against the Syrian government “to say that this government is not legitimate because a large portion of its population is displaced”. The latter also added that everyone was able to go back to Assad controlled areas and that they only could not go back to “areas where there are terrorists” in reference to non-government controlled areas. The SSNP representative explained that it was not a matter of nationality and that their position would have been the same regardless of the refugees’ nationality since they believe in Greater Syria. Nevertheless, they added that “Lebanese people, in general, don’t like to have foreign people, but only tourists in their home country”. When asked about whether more lobbying for funds should be considered, SSNP raised the issue of return. The representative said that “there should be more lobbying for funds or more lobbying to have them go back to their home country or both”. According to Kataeb party, political parties, especially those in Government, are scapegoating refugees.

They are using it in elections. Not having electricity supply 24/7 is being blamed on refugees. Not having proper infrastructure is blamed on refugees. The waste

crisis that we had in Lebanon was partly also blamed on refugees. So the government is benefiting from their presence by justifying all the corruption and all the problems that Lebanon is suffering from and blaming them on refugees and creating this hate between the local communities/ the Lebanese people and the refugees.

The Kataeb party spokesperson explained that there has never been a policy on managing refugees other than a “laissez faire” response where “collective memory” of Lebanese was used to push through political agendas as they are reminded of the Palestinian refugees experience. In addition, the spokesperson said that “we saw that in the 2018 parliamentary elections, part of it was a big debate about refugees and what should happen. Now you don’t hear about refugees because there are no elections anymore”. The Lebanese Forces (LF) representative agrees that the narrative on refugees has been “racist” and “xenophobic” where all Lebanon’s problems were blamed on refugees and some started advocating to send them away at any cost and in any way. The LF representative stated that their party was against that, but also clearly stated that they were not on the other spectrum wanting to keep refugees in Lebanon because they were Sunnis and can be used in the future “for political gains or electoral gains”.

Security has also been a major concern in Lebanon with respect to the presence of “foreigners” or refugees in Lebanon. The FMP spokesperson stated that although “some have fled terrorism in Syria, others have joined and embraced the cause of terrorism in Syria”. For the Tashnag representative, Syrian refugees became a burden as “their numbers increased to 1/3 of the Lebanese population, and in some towns they joined in

creating security problems especially in the North and bordering areas”. The Kataeb representative also mentioned security in terms of conflict between the host community and the Syrian refugees by giving an example of what host communities are perceiving as a threat. The spokesperson explains that in areas where you have for example 20,000 residents and 50,000 refugees, the local community feels outnumbered and threatened by their presence considering that “security is a privilege” in those host communities where the rule of law is less likely. The Kataeb party spokesperson, also added that the issue of refugees in Lebanon has been constantly raised, but that

It is not about being racist or having extreme views but it is about taking care of our own country because we have a collapsing country. We can call it collapsed. It collapsed. It is not about not wanting to help. It is about not being able to help. So, the international community and people in the academic field need to understand that the position of the Lebanese is not coming from a racist mentality or radical mentality or extreme mentality. It is coming from the mentality that we are unable to sustain ourselves, how are we going to be able to sustain other people.

Therefore, everyone agrees that the Syrian refugee crisis has progressed from being seen from a humanitarian lens with the initial open borders policy in Lebanon to a more political tool that is being exhausted by the economic hardships and the downfall of the Lebanese Lira which is, however, caused by the corruption of the Lebanese government also impacting security in the country.

### *Historic Angle: The Palestinian Refugees and the Syrian Occupation*

*“There was a strong belief that if we put them in one camp or two or three camps it's going to be another refugee experience that nobody wanted to replicate”.*

*- FM Interview*

#### **Theme #5-** Historic Angle: The Palestinian Refugees and the Syrian Occupation

**Description:** The experiences of Lebanese with the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and that of the Syrian Occupation has contributed to the perception of Syrian refugees today.

Political parties interviewed have often referred to Lebanon's history in reference to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Those defining events of the country's past were (a) The Palestinian Refugees experience and (b) The Syrian occupation of Lebanon. In reference to Chapter 4, it is worth restating that Syrian armed forces occupied Lebanon until 2005 when, powered by the Cedar revolution that took so many Lebanese to the streets, Syrian troops were required to leave Lebanon. As indicated in Chapter 4, the position of non-encampments towards the Syrian refugees is explained in part by the history of the PLO that fought Israel from the Lebanese territories and Palestinian refugee camps being infiltrated with radical groups.

The Future Movement spokesperson explained the non-encampment policy in the case of Syrian refugees in relation to the Palestinian refugee experience in Lebanon by stating that “there was a belief that it could be a repeat of the Palestinian experience so they did not allow them to stay in refugee camps or to build refugee camps”. The representative adds that, it was a lack of policy and understanding of the crisis that pushed for non-encampment. Therefore, “there was a strong belief that if we put them in

one camp or two or three camps it's going to be another refugee experience that nobody wanted to replicate". He added that this historic experience has also contributed to decision not to sign the Geneva Convention that would give refugees rights in Lebanon. As mentioned above, the FPM representative also compared the Syrian refugee crisis to the Palestinian refugee crisis in their stated position towards naturalization. The representative elaborated this point by stating that: "The Palestinian issue is at the source of all the problems that came later including the Syrian refugee issue". SSNP representative also raised the issue of Palestinian refugees who are forced to stay out of their homeland because of international politics in their discussion of Syrian refugees. For the Kataeb party representative, it was important to find a solution to the crisis because the ultimate goal is the return of Syrian refugees to their home country and "not to stay in Lebanon and not to have the same problem that we are having with the Palestinian Refugees". The representative then continued to explain that if Syrians were to bear arms "to fight the Assad regime or to do something related to that, we will be totally against that because we don't want another Palestinian problem per say in Lebanon". However, they reiterated several times that this is not the case in Lebanon today and that the Syrian refugee crisis differs in all aspects from the Palestinian experience. This has also been affirmed by the PSP representative who believed that Syrians have the right to return home and their situation is totally different than that of Palestinians. The LF party spokesperson also stated that "the situation during the civil war was quite different", but that it was still in the minds of the people so the government was "very careful and very skeptical in the way they dealt with the Syrian refugees-

definitely!’. In contradiction to other parties, the Kataeb party spokesperson considered government controlled camps which are managed in coordination with UNHCR and other international organizations is a much better solution than the chaos we currently have in Lebanon. This view of establishing camps has also been affirmed by the Lebanese Forces (LF) spokesperson who stated that in the initial phases of the Syrian refugees’ influx, they called on the government to

Organize specific camps like Jordan did. Organize and make sure that no weapons are being entered into the camp or used in the camp. It goes back to the organization that the Lebanese government should have done and the protection and mitigation plans that is should have put in place.

The LF representative added that this might not be something feasible at this point and that working on the issue of return may be the more practical way forward.

For the PSP representative, who consider his party “bias” in promoting human rights, did compare the Palestinian experience in terms of being treated well and having rights to that of the Syrian refugees today. The spokesperson claimed that they, as a party, have been accused of being “bias” to refugees especially Palestinian refugees whom they stood by. Today, they see the issue of Syrian refugees from the same lens of humanitarianism. According to the PSP spokesperson, whenever they were in charge of the ministries of health and education, their “political party always stood by them” so that they could get the assistance they needed. Nevertheless, they explained the fear around encampment with the following:



What happened is that the parties that are traditionally against the issue of refugees opposed the creation of the camps. It considered that if we established camps for the Syrians, the reality of the situation of the Syrians will be the same as that of the Palestinians and they will stay in Lebanon all this time and the camps would become an entity separate from the Lebanese government so they were scared and they didn't agree with us on the establishment of camps.

The Syrian occupation has also become part of the Lebanese national trauma. For the Lebanese military forces, it was important to safeguard the return of refugees to Syria because the Lebanese understand "how bad the Syrian regime is and how threatening, even life threatening, for these people it is to go back to Syria without international guarantees or international protection". The representative added that "these are people, I will say, who have the same enemy, or who are suffering from the same regime, which is the Assad regime, that has hurt the Lebanese people for years before the 2011 revolution".

In sum, the issue of Palestinian refugees along with the Syrian occupation of Lebanon until 2005 have in many ways lingered and shaped the fears and perceptions towards Syrian refugees today.

#### *Government's Response: Success or Failure?*

*"The Lebanese Government failed in managing this crisis, failed to manage the displacement, and failed in encouraging them to go back. Why? Because it was politically bias".*  
*- PSP Interview*

#### **Theme #6-** Government's Response: Success or Failure?

**Description:** The Lebanese government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has had some successes, but mostly failures.

Considering Lebanon's already weak infrastructure and scarce resources, the government's response has been at times praised and at other times criticized for their management of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon.

There were some successes highlighted by some political parties, whereas other parties castigate the government for its total failure and lack of response on the crisis. The Tashnag party representative did not believe that "the government had great shortcomings in dealing with the refugee crisis" and that "the government acted based on its capabilities". According to the Future Movement representative, the government response was successful on several levels. When it came to education, the representative explained that public schools created double shift systems where students can go to school in the afternoon to learn within the Lebanese curriculum of education in conjunction with limited physical and human resources. When it came to health care, the FM representative explained that UNHCR acted as an insurance company between Syrian refugees and hospitals and that UNHCR were able to attend for their needs because of the excess of human resources in the medical field present in Lebanon. For food security, the FM representative, explained that Syrian refugees were provided for by the UN with a debit card and money to spend. PSP spokesperson affirmed the position of FM in terms of health and education especially that they held those ministries for some time. However, they still considered the government response to have failed in managing

the Syrian refugees' portfolio. Hence, "the General Security followed up on some matters, the Labor Ministry followed up on some matters, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs followed up on some matters. There was multiplicity and chaos in managing this portfolio". PSP spokesperson, thus, believes that had the government created camps where it can manage refugees on the borders with Syria, it would have also helped create trust between the government and the international bodies assisting refugees in administering aids to refugees. Going forward, PSP representative focuses on the need for the government to work in collaboration with UNHCR and other international stakeholders that could guarantee Syrian refugees' safety to return home.

The Marada movement spokesperson criticized the Lebanese government for failing to find a long-term solution to the Syrian refugee crisis. The Marada representative stated that the only serious initiative to address the Syrian refugee crisis was a personal initiative rather than a government initiative. This was the personal initiative of Abbas Ibrahim, head of Lebanon's General Security directorate, who sought to directly communicate, on his behalf, with the Syrian regime to return refugees (Assi, 2019). His efforts were also noted by the SSNP representative who stated "there was no proper work done on the return of refugees and the Syrian refugee crisis". For the FPM representative, the government did not deal with the issue of the Syrian refugee crisis and had no policy other than the return policy that came late in 2019, because it is a political issue. Hezbollah found the government's efforts to be both "unconvincing" and "unsatisfying" and insisted that the Lebanese Government develop "a national strategy to address this affair" (The Lebanese Center for Human Rights, 2013). SSNP spokesperson

explained this failure with the government's divide over the matter. They explained that the government was divided into two fronts on the subject matter. One political camp "wants the Lebanese government to coordinate with the Syrian government to get the Syrians to Syria and the other camp wants to use the Syrians as a card against the Syrian government". SSNP spokesperson considered the government incapable and lacks the financial responses to properly respond to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. The Kataeb party representative considered the government's response to be poor while accusing them of lacking a plan designed to respond to the crisis. The spokesperson added that today a government response is much harder now that refugees are dispersed all over the country and we have no proper count of the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This also translates into difficulties in terms of aid because it is harder to reach refugees in need once you do not really know where each refugee is. The spokesperson added that

It's about how to respond to something that is present and it's de-facto. It is happening, not something that you can control, but at the same time you can control the impact that this problem is having on your country and this is where again our government failed.

For the Kataeb party spokesperson, the government response was simply a political one with different camps pushing for refugees to stay and maybe even naturalize them while others seeking to exploit the refugees for political purposes to influence local politics in Lebanon. It was also noted that the Syrians in Lebanon are not homogeneous, since some are fleeing the regime and others support the regime. This can also be critical regarding the potential spillover of the violence from Syria to Lebanon. This threat was affirmed by

the Lebanese Forces representative who “are aware of the huge security risk that a huge number of refugees might create by being infiltrated by minority groups like ISIS and other Islamic groups -which is a reality”. Today, the Kataeb party representative asks the Government, who is currently an ally of the Assad regime, to offer the refugees a safe return to Syria because many of them “are afraid of criminal charges, they are afraid their lands might be taken, their children being taken to the army, and all that”. The Lebanese Forces (LF) spokesperson also agrees that the main problem is “with the failure of the Lebanese government”. The LF representative further explains that the only two decisions the government made in terms of responding to the Syrian refugee crisis was closing the borders in 2014 and in designing a return policy in 2019 “on how to have them return home”. LF considered the first policy as “non-sense” and stated that:

“opening the borders for 3 years without any control and then all of a sudden closing the borders all together without any distinction or specific rules and regulations, it was nonsense. We were trying to fix a big problem with a bigger problem.”

The LF representative added that today, from a non-racial and non-xenophobic angle, the issue of return is a practical issue to work on where there is a reassessment for every refugee’s case in order to keep their refugee status or send them back to their home country. From their perspective as a party, the Lebanese government needs to

Start to organize their return to North East Syria if they are from this region which has been safe for a long time in cooperation with Turkey and through Turkey to Northern Syria or in cooperation through the regime Syria through the embassy to

send them back to the areas around Damascus that have been quite stable and have no political interest from their return. If they are only staying here for economic reasons we should treat them as migrant workers and not refugees in that sense.

Therefore, the first step towards managing the crisis moving forward is to reassess the number of refugees in Lebanon and to reclassify them in accordance with international law and UNHCR. Political parties thus believe that at this point it is time to reassess the Syrian refugee portfolio and move forward with the policy of return that was designed in 2019.

### *International Funding*

*“International assistance that was directed at vulnerable Lebanese families got sidetracked to refugees”- Tashnag Interview*

### **Theme #7- International Funding**

**Description:** International funding has assisted Lebanon in its response to the Syrian refugee crisis, but in other instances such assistance is seen as biased towards refugees’ needs at the expense of the host community.

Lebanon has received funding from the international community, as explained in Chapter 4. Funds through international conferences like Cedre conferences and others have been directly transferred to the Lebanese government to aid in the management of the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Other funds through UNHCR and other international organizations have been directly given to Syrian refugees for their day to day needs. FM representative explains that the international community through Brussels conferences

and others have went through their own process of progression and change as they realized that the issue of refugees in Lebanon is no longer categorized as humanitarian and that the impact has become socio-economic, political, and security. Quoting the FM representative:

The international community started dealing with the problem in the beginning as a humanitarian problem and then they realized it's going to drag for years to come, so they started approaching it as a developmental and social problem. So, if you go back to Brussels, the first or second conference, it's clear that the discussion with Lebanon, at least on refugees, started shifting to talking about job creations, how we can alleviate some of the sufferings of the Lebanese from the Syrians, and so it became a social, security, and economic problem. The approach to dealing and managing this was to allocate, in the case of Lebanon, about 1 1/2 billion dollars per year to host communities and to the Syrians directly.

The FPM representative pointed to the other stream of money going directly to Syrians which he termed as “fresh money”. This term has been more often than less used in Lebanon in the economic crisis to describe fresh dollars that can be exchanged in the black market for 8 times the pre-crisis dollar to lira exchange, thus exacerbating the view that refugees are making more money now than the deteriorating economic conditions in the community that is hosting them. This is also supported by Tashnag party representative who considered that the refugee crisis had sidetracked some of the international aid money that usually goes to vulnerable Lebanese families. Consequently, the FPM representative has asked the international community to send funds to Syrians in

Syria where they can safely be until a political solution is reached. The FPM spokesperson explained that this is one way in which the Syrians would then go back home and receive the funds there rather than in Lebanon. This position has been also affirmed by the SSNP representative who stated that they would rather have international funds going “to the Syrian government and have them (the Syrians) go back to Syria and be provided with better living conditions in Syria and not in Lebanon”. Hezbollah leader, Sayyid Nasrallah, “warned of local and international efforts aimed at dissuading refugees from going home”(Reuters Staff, 2018a). While the LF representative acknowledges the impact of sending fresh money to refugees in euros and dollars, the representative asks “how is it their fault?” The downfall of the Lebanese Lira is not the fault of refugees.

When asked about their alliance with Hezbollah, FPM representative explained that it was a coalition rather than an alliance where both parties would be aligned on all policies. The representative explained that they were historically aligned with the aggressed against the aggressor stating the following: “We are those who faced Syrian occupation when it was Lebanon alone and against all odds and we are the same people that faced Israeli invasion in 2006 against all odds standing with the aggressed against the aggressor” in reference to their current alliance with Hezbollah with whom they might not agree on internal policies, but agree together on the “protection of Lebanon”.

SSNP representative linked international funds to Lebanon to the lack of proper government response to the crisis by stating that:

They gave Turkey more than 10 billion dollars to support the refugees in Turkey and the number of refugees in Turkey is as much as the number of refugees in



Lebanon while we did not get more than 800 million dollars and they did not come directly to the Lebanese government, but went to UNHCR.

On the other hand, the Kataeb party representative considered international funds as a positive aspect coming out of the Syrian crisis because the understanding of the crisis and its impact has internationally changed and today funds are more or less allocated equally to both refugees and host communities. This position is affirmed by the LF spokesperson who thought aid became more structural over the years after the Syrian crisis began and that today funds are allocated for more long term objectives and are more sustainable projects such as “building school”, “building infrastructure”, and “developing small businesses”. All of those target both the host community and the refugees alike. The problem thus lies with the corruption and mismanagement of those funds according to the Lebanese Forces.

Therefore, international funds have played a critical role in the Syrian refugee crisis response. While some consider that the stream of funds is now being allocated to more sustainable projects targeting both host communities and refugees alike, others are asking the international community to send this assistance directly Syria where it would encourage Syrian refugees to move back to.

In sum, there are several themes that came out of the interviews with representatives of traditional political parties in Lebanon. Categorizing Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon into refugees meant that they had refugee rights under international law, migrant workers meant that they would only abide by local law established on foreigners working in Lebanon, and displaced meant that they have been temporarily

uprooted and are in-limbo waiting to return home. The fear of refugees interfering with the national delicate sectarian balance was another recurrent theme among the party representatives interviewed. This was especially and existentialist threat to Marada, FPM, LF, and Kataeb which are also mainly Christian parties. In addition, threat narratives and saving face in support of those perceived threats at the economic, political, and security level included variations of scapegoating and stigmatization of Syrian refugees who were blamed for many of Lebanon's problems. Those threats was followed by another theme which is the historic angle dealing with Lebanon's experience with the Palestinian refugees experience and the Syrian occupation. Plus, the government response's failure of success mainly centered around small efforts for different ministries to do their jobs with no coordination with other ministries and no unified government position on the subject matter. While international funds were seen as key to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, others saw those funds being sidetracked from local host communities to refugees or used as a tool to keep refugees in Lebanon while they receive aid. The positions of both Amal and Hezbollah were sourced from online media as previously mentioned. The following table sums those themes and their description.

**Table 1***Political Parties' Key Themes*

<b>Political Parties' Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>
#1- Categorizing Syrians Seeking Refuge	Political party leaders have categorized Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon as refugees, migrants, or displaced persons.
#2- Non-refoulement v/s Non-settlement	Representatives are divided between those who support the U.N. notion of non-refoulement and those who support the notion of non-settlement on Lebanese territories.
#3- Existentialist Fear and the Demographic Balance	Representatives fear that any demographic change in the country is a direct threat to their existence in a confessional system.
#4- The Perceived Threat and Saving Face	There are clear reasons to believe that refugees are a threat to Lebanon at the economic, political, and security levels.
#5- Historic Angle: The Palestinian Refugees and the Syrian Occupation	The experiences of Lebanese with the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and that of the Syrian Occupation has contributed to the perception of Syrian refugees today.
#6- Government's Response: Success or Failure?	The Lebanese government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has had some successes, but mostly failures.
#7- International Funding	International funding has assisted Lebanon in its response to the Syrian refugee crisis, but in other instances such assistance is seen as biased towards refugees' needs at the expense of the host community.

*Constituents: Key Themes and Sub-themes*

Among the constituents of the political parties surveyed, there is a general consensus that the topic of refugees is controversial. 95% of those who responded to this

particular question considered the topic controversial. This was cross-cutting amongst all constituents representing the 10 political parties. The following are the key themes and sub-themes that shaped constituent's understanding of the Syrian refugee Crisis.

### *Defining Refugees*

#### **Theme #1- Defining Refugees**

**Description:** Constituents expressed no shared definition for refugees in Lebanon.

Regarding the definition of refugees, all parties' respondents seemed in agreement that refugees are persons who were "forced" to flee their home country, at least that in the beginning of the war when such persons decided to flee the country because they were scared of persecution and for better living conditions. It is noteworthy to state that one SSNP respondent considered that "there are no refugees" and that "we are the children of one people".

The reasons and conditions defining refugees differed from one person to the other. The respondents of Amal party emphasized that refugees were "obliged to take such a decision and are unable to return in the near future" because they needed to "escape" war. Marada and Kataeb respondents also agreed that refugees were "obliged" to flee their country, but the Kataeb stressed that this situation is "temporary". They further explain that refugees "were forced to leave their homeland due to war, discrimination, and murder" because of their "beliefs". This has also been supported by PSP respondents who stated that refugees are those who are "displaced from their country because of the oppression of Assad" and that they "are people whose land was stolen due to war". PSP respondents also state that they are "forcefully" "seeking refuge" in another

country fleeing “persecution”, “conflict”, and “crisis”. This has also been supported by SSNP respondents who stated that refugees were “obliged to leave their country to escape war” and are “seeking asylum” in another country “until they can return”. Some Kataeb respondents considered that refugees fleeing are either “exiled” or “non-combatants” while one PSP respondent considered them “homeless”. The FPM respondents also stated that refugees fled their country from “persecution and violence” in search for “safety” in another country. One respondent stated that this defining of refugee is no longer applicable to Syrians “since most of their country is safe now” and thus they can return home. FM respondents also believed that Syrians left their country seeking shelter and to “escape from their government”, to “survive”, and to seek “basic human rights” which includes “education” and “healthcare”. Hezbollah respondents also understood the definition as those seeking refuge in a safer place. They stated that they are usually coming “from neighboring countries” and that it was the host community’s responsibility “to take care of them”. While some thought it was key to host them and take care of them, other considered that they have the one who became refugees in their “own country”.

Some defined refugees by their nationality and others by the UNHCR definition. An Amal respondent defined refugees as “Syrians”. While a PSP respondent supported the latter’s definition of “Syrians”, a Tashnag respondent stated that both “Syrians and Palestinians” are the definition of refugees. A Hezbollah, a PSP, and a Kataeb respondent also agreed that refugees were defined by the latter nationalities. A Tashnag respondent went further to divide refugees into two categories and defined them as “voluntary

refugees” and “involuntary refugees”. The former are the Syrians “who left their country willingly for political or economic reasons”, and the latter are “Palestinians who were forced to leave” to leave their country. Other Tashnag party respondents agreed that refugees “are people who were forced to leave their home and country to seek refuge in another location”. While one FPM respondent referenced UNHCR’s definition of refugee, 3 LF respondents stated the same in terms of refugees fleeing their country because they are persecuted “on account of race, religion, political opinion, nationality or membership of a particular social group”. Other LF respondents considered those fleeing have fled “war” and “poverty” under “extreme” circumstances. One LF respondent stated that refugees are all “non-Lebanese in Lebanon”.

Hence, regardless of the political party the respondent voted for in the 2018 parliamentary elections, they define refugees differently. Though they all agree that they were forced to flee their country, others do not categorize them as refugees, and some consider them homeless, exiled, non-combatants, non-Lebanese, are Syrians or/and Palestinians, or economic migrants. Again, across parties, constituents have no clear definition of refugees which makes it harder to conceptualize “the other” and address the refugee crisis accordingly.

#### *Refugees’ Intentions: To Leave or to Stay?*

**Theme #2-** Refugees’ Intentions: To Leave or to Stay?

**Description:** Constituents were divided among those who perceived the refugees as intending to stay and make a life in Lebanon and those who saw their stay to be

temporary as they seek to return to Syria.

The intention of Syrian refugees who arrived in Lebanon was subject to debate. While most considered their intention is to seek refuge in a safer country, one Amal respondent stated that they fled the war “to seek a substitute country” in Lebanon. Amal respondent stated that “Syrian refugees escaped the atrocities in Syria from the free Syrian army and ISIS” which both worked against the Syrian Assad Regime in different capacities. Another considered that “many of them are not true refugees” explaining those are the ones that “came here as part of the ISIS agenda” and that ISIS is seeking to enlarge its presence on Lebanese territories. For the Kataeb party respondents, refugees’ intentions are mainly to “escape” and to “survive” the war in Syria for a “temporary” period of time. FPM considered that the intention is “to stay here” for “as long as they can” in reference to Lebanese territories. One considered that Lebanon is unsafe and wondered “why they are able to survive in Lebanon instead of surviving in Syria”. Others considered that Syrians may not have a personal agenda themselves, but that other countries are using them to pressure the Lebanese government and mainly the current “president to apply their own agendas for Lebanon”. This was also supported by a Hezbollah respondent in terms of pressuring the Lebanese government and using refugees as a political tool. SSNP respondent also considered refugees are being used for political agendas. Other FPM respondents stated that their intention was either to find better work conditions and take advantage of humanitarian aid, or to be naturalized into Lebanese citizens.

In terms of refugees' intentions, a lot of focus was on the stream of money and the finances of refugees, others focused on refugees seeking to stay and naturalize. Almost all FM respondents stated that in the short term their "intent is to generate income to sustain their families". This statement was supported by the LF respondent who stated that their intention is to "live in Lebanon and sustain a job providing remittance to their families back home". FM and LF respondents also supported the notion that they were in Lebanon to live off "aid from NGO's" or "international financial assistance" without "investing in Lebanon". Some Hezbollah respondents stated that refugees just wanted "to live a normal life" until they can go "back to their homes". The majority considered their intention was to stay in Lebanon and to work and make money for better living conditions. According to a Kataeb respondent, "a good number aim to stay here (Lebanon) and never go back; either because it's not safe to go back or because the conditions in Lebanon became better than their original country". Other further elaborated that the intent of Syrian refugees is "to occupy the land" and "remain in Lebanon" while they "mooch" Lebanon's resources. In affirmation to this statement, the LF respondent stated that "it's a direct way to abuse the country's land and resources". The statement added that this was "an indirect way to have control and occupy a territory which is why many do not return" to their home country. A Marada respondent supported the latter by stating that "their intention is not sound, especially since many areas have become safe in Syria, but they are not ready to return".

Therefore, constituents had mixed perspectives on the intentions of refugees in Lebanon. While some stated they were "temporarily" seeking refuge, other thought that



they were there to stay and make money off of the labor market and international humanitarian aid, or to stay and naturalize to become Lebanese citizens. Though refugees are also not homogeneous in nature and may have different reasons for why they fled their country, the host community's perception of their intention is key in the relationship formed between them and the host community.

*Palestinians and Syrians: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*

**Theme #3-** Palestinians and Syrians: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

**Description:** Constituents persistently compared Syrians to Palestinian refugees.

There has been a great emphasis on Palestinians and the Palestinian refugee experience in Lebanon from party constituents. Drawing comparisons between both Syrians and Palestinians or categorizing them in the same group or of the same nature is clearly stated in the recorded responses. Answers to questions in the questionnaire brought striking comparisons that respondents made between both Palestinians and Syrians.

Those comparisons were laid out by respondents on various topics. According to the FPM respondent, in Lebanon "Palestinians and Syrians represent the majority of refugees". The Hezbollah respondent also compared both Syrians and Palestinians stating that: Palestinian refugees' land was taken and should be returned. Also, Syrians have problems and until the government (Assad regime) has full control over all Syria they need us to be safe. Another FPM responded considered that the intentions of refugees must be clearly differentiated between Palestinians and Syrians stating the following:

Case of the Syrians: Some of them are truthfully fleeing terror of war but the others are just seeking better work conditions and humanitarian aids. Case of the Palestinians: nowadays a second or third generation is living in the country and actually seeking naturalization.

On the same topic, the FPM respondents also delineated between both group's intentions stating that:

For the Syrians, they want to stay here because they are living a better life than the one they had in Syria. For the Palestinian, either they want to get the Nationality or leave the country if they get any opportunity.

While the FPM respondents had different comparisons between Palestinians and Syrians, a Kataeb respondent also separated both group's intentions into: "Syrians: to be temporary away from the war situation in their country and obviously to take advantage of the UN support. Palestinians are waiting for the occasion to return back to their country". Another Kataeb respondent also stated that everyone knows why Palestinian refugees are in Lebanon. In his words, they are in Lebanon, because the Lebanese labor law gave Palestinians equality in "certain" rights with the Lebanese Laborer in comparison to other foreigners. The respondent continues to explain that, Syrian refugees on the other hand "found Lebanon as a peaceful land after the Syrian war started in 2011, but their existence, nowadays, constitutes a burden on the Lebanese economy specifically and on Lebanon in general". One Kataeb respondent also stated that "some refugees have clearly expressed their intentions "in taking over" the country like Palestinians and others (Syrians) have gone out of control in terms of numbers and illegality". Moreover, an

Amal respondent also stated: “there is a fear that the Syrian refugee crisis will turn into a copy of the Palestinian crisis by (Syrians) not being able to return to their country”. This, according to a Tashnag respondent, is “similar to the Palestinian refugees case” and thus “the situation does not look hopeful”. The LF respondent also raised the same concerns. A Kataeb respondent also expressed fear for the repetition of the Palestinian scenario if the Syrians seek naturalization or a “substitute country”. The LF respondent explained that

the big number of Syrian refugees reminds us of the Palestinian refugees who stayed in Lebanon and were a major actor in the civil war. They can use the land of Lebanon to recruit people and fight because of the proximity of countries.

A PSP respondent asked why would Syrian refugees ever go back when the international community is taking care of them and that they are working and making money. The respondent compared the situation to that of the Palestinians when he said “they will never go back just like the Palestinians”. Plus, another PSP respondent stated: “we have experience with the Palestinians and no one left”.

In brief, regardless of the question being asked in the questionnaire, respondents had the tendency to compare the current Syrian Refugee Crisis to that of the Palestinian refugee issue in Lebanon. The two case may be very well perceived as totally different from political parties, but this definitely does not reflect on their constituents.

#### *The Perceived Threat and the Constant Fear*

#### **Theme #4-** The Perceived Threat and the Constant Fear

**Description:** The constituents’ intense fears centered on the perceived threats by

refugees of the political, economic, and security sectors of Lebanese society.

Fear from the other has shaped the relationship between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host community. Based on the following statements from respondents, the threat narrative on the political, economic, and security level is growing amidst a highly volatile local and regional context.

According to the Kataeb respondent, whether it is intentional or not, “the existence of refugees in Lebanon has been really harmful for both the economy and homeland security”. Despite this expression of harm, this respondent recognized the benefits gains from international aid and assistance. The Tashnag and the FPM respondents agreed and considered that they are putting more “pressures” on the Lebanese economy. The Amal respondents also affirmed this position by stating that the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon “is horrible for the economy” and “jeopardizes the relative political stability” in Lebanon. The respondent adds that “the Syrian worker has withheld job opportunities from the Lebanese worker, and some are afraid of naturalization”. Another Amal respondent feels “frustrated” because there are no more opportunities for the youth to work and several Lebanese families are facing difficulties and “are hungry because of the large number of our Syrian brothers that took all our job opportunities”. Another respondent stressed that they not only are taking jobs, but that the “UN provides them with everything” they need in form of assistance. The PSP respondents also reiterated that the situation is an unbearable burden on the economy because it is affecting locals in the job market. The Marada respondents, who considered

there was no point for refugees to be in Lebanon considering most of Syria is safe said they were “infuriated”. The Tashnag respondents also agreed with the previously mentioned on the labor market challenges, stating that Syrians are “cheap labor” making the local laborers seem as if they were “more expensive” to hire. They also stated that the UN cannot support refugees “without helping the host country”. This has also been raised by LF respondents stating that Syrian refugees presence in Lebanon “aggravates Lebanon’s vulnerabilities” and puts a huge burden on the economy threatening “to take up jobs”. The LF respondent stated that the marketplace next door “had Lebanese people working in it, now all the staff is Syrian”. In the words of one FM respondent: “They are taking our jobs”. One respondent also stated that now non-governmental organizations have switched from “helping Lebanese to helping refugees”. For a Kataeb respondent it was a “catastrophe”. This general feeling of being overwhelmed by Syrians in the job market has been affirmed by several Kataeb respondents stating that Syrians “have replaced Lebanese” in the work force and that they have become a huge burden to bear on the Lebanese economy. Another FM respondent also talked about a personal experience and explained that her husband worked at the Beirut port, but they preferred “to employ Syrians because they are paid less than the Lebanese”. Other Amal respondents also stated that they were worried “because the number of displaced Syrians exceeds the capacity of a country like Lebanon” to bear this “burden” since Lebanon is not a “self-sufficient country” and is a country that is struggling to meet its local population needs”. Tashnag respondents agreed with that. Only one Amal respondent had a personal experience with regards to losing jobs stating that “a lot of my family lost their

jobs because of the Syrian workers”. One Kataeb respondent also shared a story of applying for a job and getting accepted only to be turned away for a Syrian worker who accepted a slightly lower salary. Several Amal respondents stated that it was not about refugees or their nationality, but it was about job opportunities taken from the Lebanese because Syrians are accepting “difficult working conditions and low wages”. This was also affirmed by several of the Tashnag respondents who reiterated that they were once refugees themselves or are the granddaughters and grandsons of Armenian refugees who relocated to Lebanon and that it was more about the weak Lebanese infrastructure and poor governance that lead to a lack of mitigation and organization measures to address the crisis. They stated that “Lebanon was not prepared to welcome a large number of refugees” with the current state of corruption in Lebanon. Another Tashnag respondent considered hosting this large number of refugees in Lebanon “a big injustice towards the Lebanese nation as a whole”. One Tashnag respondent further stated that his dad “lost his work because of a Syrian person who accepted to work for 300,000L.L. per month”.

Moreover, another Tashnag constituent stated the following:

My parents were refugees at some point, but they were never a burden on the country that hosted them. Instead, they helped with being productive and invested in every field - industry, education, and culture. I know for a fact that they are occupying some job vacancies that could be occupied by Lebanese citizens instead.

The FM respondents also affirmed this position stating that “it is a big burden on a country that is already sinking in debts and corruption”. Another FM respondent affirmed

the latter, but argued that “at the same time their presence caused an influx of money into the country through aid or money transfers, and helped create new jobs through aid programs and refugee-owned businesses”. Still, other FPM respondents stated that they are the “major” reason of the current dire economic situation in Lebanon. Another FPM respondent explained that Syrian refugees “are using the country’s resources that aren’t even enough for the Lebanese themselves and are costing the government a lot of losses”. One FPM respondent, who disclosed working with refugees, stated that a “huge majority” of Syrians in Lebanon are “here to take the jobs of local citizens”. Another considered that now refugees “live better than the host community and in the same time are receiving assistance”. In contrast, another FPM respondent stated that

FPM is trying to use the refugee crisis to boost its popularity and as an "excuse" for its failures on several topics. As an example, it is true that 1.5 million additional people in the country will put an additional pressure on the electrical grids of the country, but the failure in the electricity domain can't be solely attributed to the increased number of refugees in the country. Corruption is as clear as the sun and the party has failed to address it or combat it.

This is definitely interesting considering that Gebran Bassil, FPM party’s promises on having 24/7 electricity in Lebanon have been long overdue. FM respondents also considered that hosting a large number of refugees is above the capacity of Lebanon and its infrastructure. The FM respondents stated that “Lebanon is a small country and cannot absorb a large number of refugees” since this “negatively” affects the economy and they are “naturally competing with the Lebanese labor force over jobs”. Hezbollah

respondents agreed with the previous FPM statement and explained that Syrians intensified the crisis “since they are using all our infrastructure and they are benefiting from the subsidized rate of Lebanese pound” in reference to getting fresh dollars and exchanging them to Lebanese Liras while Lebanese can barely find dollars in the black market. Other respondents claimed that Syrian refugees are taking “our rights” and “sometimes getting our work and being hospitalized for free” while the Lebanese “suffer”. One respondent stated the following in affirmation: “I work in a hospital where I see refugees hospitalized, but not Lebanese. They are taking their places”.

Aside from the economic challenges associated with the presence of Syrian refugees, some respondents expression the fear of decreased stability, increased criminality, and a potential change in demographics. A Kataeb respondent recounted how he or she? grew up in a town full of refugees and, as a result became “uncomfortable” living in their own town. They also mentioned that they were subject to “robberies” by refugees. Another stated: “we all heard about a lot of crimes happening in refugee camps”. One Kataeb respondent recalled an episode where “refugees invaded our summer house and stole everything!! Even the sanitary pipes! Refugees raped my cousins and took jobs as concierges in many buildings only to end up stealing residents’ houses”. One LF respondent stated that they have “heard from families that they have committed robbery and crime so many times”. Another just asked anyone to take a stroll in the Bekaa Valley “to see the amount of land they occupy”. They were castigated as “filthy” people who did not follow “basic hygiene standards”. The Amal respondent mentioned hearing “many stories in the news” about “thieves and criminals that came preliminarily



from the refugee camps”. Furthermore, the Amal respondent stated that refugees are “a danger” to their society because of “ISIS” and the support they have from a number of Syrians. Another Amal participant affirmed the latter’s position by stating that “Syrian “refugees” are essentially ISIS personnel disguised as civilians”. This has also been affirmed by the FPM respondent, who acknowledged that this is not a blanket statement, but that some refugees who “joined terrorist organizations” such as “ISIS or Al Nusra” and fought the “Lebanese Army” mostly in “Arsal” have harmed Lebanon. One Tashnag responded also stated “that it would make a difference if the refugees were not affiliated with Islamist radicals. If they were Tibetan Buddhist monks things would have been different”. The FMP respondents considered that refugees are a burden on the Lebanese economy, “a high crime risk”, and a “demographic change” risk. In terms of security, one FPM responded stated that “a group of them is being mobilized by extremist groups to fight against Hezbollah if a civil war is launched”. The demographic risk and the delicate balance between different sects in Lebanon was also raised by another FPM member stating that all refugees were “Sunni” which will make all other sects in the country weary of them regardless of the “humanitarian” aspect of the crisis. According to the FPM respondent, this is “disastrous” and can “cause a civil war”. This fear has also been reiterated by another FPM respondent stating that he is “afraid that the country might lose its identity if we keep them” which has also been affirmed by the SSNP respondent who fears naturalization. The FM respondent stated that nowadays you hear more Syrian dialect than Lebanese in the places where you grew up reaffirming the constant fear. A PSP respondent stated that there was no point keeping a number of Syrian refugees in

Lebanon “trying to interfere in the internal Lebanese affairs” and “causing riots and anxiety among the Lebanese citizens”.

SSNP respondents had a slightly different view based on their philosophy of Lebanon being part of Greater Syria which is a wider geographic area that includes both Syria and Lebanon among other countries, as explained in Chapter 6. Therefore, almost all respondents felt the blame is towards the government who has been unable to manage the refugee situation rather than putting the blame on refugees. They also highlighted that, under the notion of Greater Syria, both Syrians and Lebanese are one people. The SSNP respondents explained that the burden was huge on the Lebanese infrastructure, but that Lebanon has also benefitted from the fresh dollars entering the country through international aid. One respondent stated that the problem was that “cheap labor compared to Lebanese labor” should have been “reflected in prices as well”, but it was not the case. Hence, SSNP respondent considered that “it is our obligation as neighbors and members of the same Oumma (Nation) to host them until they can return” and another felt that Syrians were being “discriminated” against. Therefore, the SSNP respondents stated that “refugees in Lebanon are all from our Oumma (Nation) and they are here until they can return”. Also, for the SSNP respondents, refugees are not to blame because it is the corrupt politicians and lack of governance that lead to the current situation.

In brief, though most of the respondents considered Syrians were a competition in the job market, some respondents worked first hand with refugees and/or met with others and understood their day to day struggles and their need for employment. Still, the dire economic situation in Lebanon, according to respondents, cannot bear the burden of

refugees in the Lebanese economy. Only very few respondents had a personal story to share about how refugees impacted their lives in that matter. Others saw the threat as existentialist leading to change in demographics and the delicate balance of sects and identity of Lebanon.

#### *Political Party's Crisis Response*

##### **Theme #5-** Political Party's Crisis Response

**Description:** Constituents' perception towards their party's response varied among those who thought the party is not doing anything, doing what they can, or doing all they can.

Significantly, the constituents of the parties did not always know what the parties they last voted for in 2018 have been doing to resolve the Syrian refugee crisis. Still, most of them would agree with their party's judgement without knowing what is their agenda or action plan on the subject matter.

When asked whether their party was responding to the crisis, most of the Amal party respondents did not know of any initiative. Only one considered "the MPs are working hardly to let the refugees return to Syria" and suggested an official dialogue between the Syrian and Lebanese Government to resolve the matter. One Amal respondent stated that "with better and temporary infrastructure, proper access to resources, and proper mitigation, the Lebanese authorities could have improved their (the Syrians') living conditions until the conflict has ended". The Tashnag party respondents focused on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis and stated that many Armenians who came to Lebanon "had connections with the party and other Armenian organizations".

They added that there is also “kinship between Lebanese Armenians and Syrian Armenians which promoted coordination to help accommodate for those refugees. Others considered that they “only help those that belong to the same sect”. While some considered that the party helped refugees, specifically Syrian Armenian refugees, more than half of the respondents said they had no clue what the party is doing to address the crisis. One stated that they are now focusing on their return to Syria. Still, most of the respondents agreed with their party’s judgements. One Tashnag respondent thought of “establishing a committee that would only work on addressing this issue” would be a good start to move forward with the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. Other Tashnag respondents sought to “distribute them equally to Arab countries”. According to the Tashnag respondents, with the current dire socio-economic situation in Lebanon, “Lebanese people themselves are entitled to refugee status, let alone hosting refugees”. One FPM respondent suggested the best way forward to resolve the crisis would require a “diplomatic solution” as soon as possible. Other FPM respondents considered that their party is “patriotic” and is addressing the refugee crisis by working hard on the “safe” return of refugees to Syria. The FM respondents stated that they also did not think that the party did much to address the issue. Some had “no idea”, others consider “they are doing their best”, and others still stated that they “all talk and do very little”. Another FM respondent explained that “They did not address it, but through their presence in government they did approach it by asking for funds/loans from the international community, and they never agreed on forced return actions while waiting for a political solution”. 90% of the FPM respondents agreed with their party’s judgment. One FM

respondent considered Hezbollah's meddling is at the core of the crisis all together so disengaging from the war in Syria and giving away their weapons would be the first step towards resolving the Syrian refugee crisis. Moreover, an FM respondent stated that the way forward is to organize refugees, "contain their number", and "deport some because we cannot help all refugees". Almost half of the respondents did not agree with the party's judgement.

The Kataeb respondents considered their party to be one of the pioneers in raising awareness and trying to address the issue. The respondents explained that their party supported the Russian initiative to mediate the return of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, but that the initiative itself did not move forward. They also explained that their party tried to address the issue by suggesting to consolidate all refugees within certain border areas, but that the government "as usual" was too late to address the issue. Today they have also stood with the right of refugees to return to safe areas in Syria "where they can live safely" under international safeguards. The overwhelming majority of those respondents supported their party's judgment on the subject matter and called to keep mounting the pressure on the government and the international community to seek a final political solution and "ease" the burden on Lebanon.

A LF respondent explained that the Lebanese Forces were in charge of two ministries in the last Hariri government and that those were the Labor Ministry and the Ministry of Social Affairs where they lobbied, advocated, and worked on a "strategy for a safe and voluntary return". They also lobbied for more funds to help "vulnerable and saturated host communities". While some said they had "no clue" what the LF party was

doing, others said they were working for the voluntary and safe return of refugees to areas deemed safe or “not bombed”. 75% of the respondents agreed with the party’s judgement. Moving forward, an LF respondent recommends the development of a “clear legal framework” to tackle “illegal entry and exit to and from Lebanon, legal status of refugees, registration of refugees by the government, their residency status and work status, and their visits back to Syria”. The PSP respondents considered that their party looks at the issue from a humanitarian perspective and has been providing food, shelter, and assistance. For the most part the respondents highly sympathized with refugees regardless of their nationalities, but only 50% of them supported the party’s judgment. For the PSP respondents moving forward entailed organizing refugees and insuring “that illegal employment is controlled in such a way that it doesn’t affect the Lebanese labor force” stating that today the situation is dire because “there is no law, no oversight, and no control of the borders”. They added that there needed to push the international community for a diplomatic and political solution to solve the root cause of the refugee crisis all the while providing refugees with a decent living.

The SSNP respondents considered that their party is working on “returning refugees to their communities” since we are all one nation and refugees belong to communities in a difference country. The SSNP respondents also considered that the SSNP are helping refugees with their needs in Lebanon. Some respondents were not sure what the party was doing to address the issue. Still, 90% of the respondents agreed with the party’s judgment on the subject matter. Moving forward the SSNP respondents suggested “coordination and full cooperation between the Lebanese state and the Syrian

state through all official channels” to work on the return of refugees to their communities “within a clear plan that preserves the dignity of the people”. The SSNP respondents were worried that refugees are being used as a tool to force normalization with Israel which was also affirmed by a Hezbollah respondent. Hezbollah respondents stated that the party is “working on returning them” because they are against “their stay or normalization”. A Hezbollah respondent further explained that they are working on the issue of return without “discrimination”. Several considered no work is being done and one person considered that the party is “taking advantage” of the crisis. 60% of the respondents agreed with the party’s judgment. Moving forward, Hezbollah respondents called other Lebanese parties not to discriminate against refugees and not to be “racists”.

### *The Recurring Issue of Return*

#### **Theme #6-** The Recurring Issue of Return

**Description:** Respondents agree that Syrian Refugees need to leave Lebanon and return to their home country.

All Lebanese constituents in this study agreed on one thing, that the Syrian refugees need to return home. While some attach “safe” to the return process, others just want them to go back home to their country Syria.

4 out of the 10 Amal constituents considered the need to return refugees to their country because it is safe for them to do so. Most had no other specific recommendation to address the issue, but to organize and mitigate, and work on return. Tashnag respondents also agreed on the need to return refugees especially that the Lebanese

economy can no longer absorb the “burdens” of hosting a large number of refugees. The FPM respondent declared that the party representative Gebran Bassil has already called for Syrians to go back home after a large number entered Lebanon. If return is not safe at this point, an FPM respondent suggested sharing the burdens with other countries and “finding other countries to host them”. Hence, while some FPM members considered the work being done towards addressing the Syrian refugee crisis is “very minimal”, others considered that FPM “has done everything it can from the beginning” since 2011. They explained that their party leader “Gebran Bassil called to close the borders and was called racist” for bringing the topic up. For FPM respondents, refugees “should leave” “regardless how” and “should be returned home” sooner than later. Similarly, the Marada respondents called for the return of Syrian refugees since they no longer needed to stay considering that presumably most of Syria is safe. For the FM respondents, “very little is being done to make sure they are on a path to return home when time is right” and “just as anything else” the Lebanese government does not have a clear strategy to organize Syrian refugees and their return. One FM respondent stated that “we will become refugees soon and we will need another country to host us”. Nevertheless, most of the FM respondents stressed the importance of the refugees’, but at the same time insisting upon their safe return home with the assistance they need. For Kataeb respondents, return of refugees was also crucial. However, as one respondent stated, “Bashar Al Assad does not want to get back these refugees; on one hand because they are in their majority Sunnis and on the other hand because he is using them as a negotiation card for the reconstruction of Syria”. Still, “it’s time for them to go back to safe places in Syria under



the supervision of the UN”. This was also supported by LF respondents who agreed it was time for Syrian refugees to go back to their home country where it is safe for them to do so. The LF respondent stated that it was important to plan the return of refugees in coordination with the government and following on the implementation of this plan. The SSNP respondents also stated that “it was time for them to go back” because the country can no longer bare the cost of having them. Another responded stated that though they sympathized with Syrian refugees and their persecution, “they must be returned to their country” when the situation is safe. The SSNP respondents also saw the need for Syrian refugees to return to their “land” and to their “communities”. Hezbollah respondents also mentioned the need for “a plan” so that refugees could return to “protected areas” in their country. Almost all respondents mentioned the “need for refugees to return in an organized way” as long as they are “guaranteed safety in their country”. They also asked for “official communication with the Syrian government” to work on the return plan “for the benefit of Lebanon”.

In conclusion, respondents within the same party had varied perceptions on what the party was actually doing to address the Syrian refugee crisis. In most of the cases, whether they knew or did not know, they still supported the party’s judgement on the matter.

### *Our History with the “Syrians”*

#### **Threat #7- Our History with the “Syrians”**

**Description:** The Syrian refugee crisis reminded the constituents of the Syrian

occupation that lasted up until 2005.

The topic of Syrian refugees has triggered memories of the Syrian occupation that was in place until 2005. For many respondents, “it would have been different if they were not Syrians”. Others considered that when Syrian refugees leave “we will be independent again” and saw this as a type of occupation as mentioned above in several statements.

A Tashnag respondent stated that “our country has a history with the Syrians”. According to the FPM respondent, this history between “Lebanon and Syria” is crucial in the general understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis. One FM respondent stated that they “did not like Syrians because of history”. Another considered that they were “bitter towards Syrians because their government murdered Rafik al Hariri,” whose assassination in 2005 led to the Cedar revolution and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. A Kataeb respondent also affirmed that the “historic relationship between the two countries” was never addressed “properly” and “erasing any human dimension” to the perception of Lebanese people to Syrians. Another reiterated that “we cannot neglect the fact that there are mixed feelings towards them because we tend to confuse between the Syrian people and the Syrian regime who occupied us, humiliated us, robbed us, and killed our leaders”. This has become “more charged with emotions”. One stated “I respect Syrians that took the streets seeking to change the ugly system of theirs”. The respondent added: “I would support the Syrians more if they demand justice for themselves and for the Lebanese whom they have wronged for over 15 years. It would be a good start to build an equal neighborly relationship. I have neutral

feelings to Syrian refugees who are fleeing the war”. One LF respondent, who works with refugee resettlement, said it was “uncomfortable” to interview them and hear about their background in the Syrian military service “when he served in my country”. Another LF respondent that they might have also felt differently if they were not Syrians because of the history of “Syrian military occupation and the humiliation of our people”.

In sum, the perception of Lebanese towards Syrians is layered and “charged with emotions” as one respondent explained. It reminded constituents of the Syrian occupation to Lebanon and all the missing Lebanese since the 1975 still in Syrian, dead or alive.

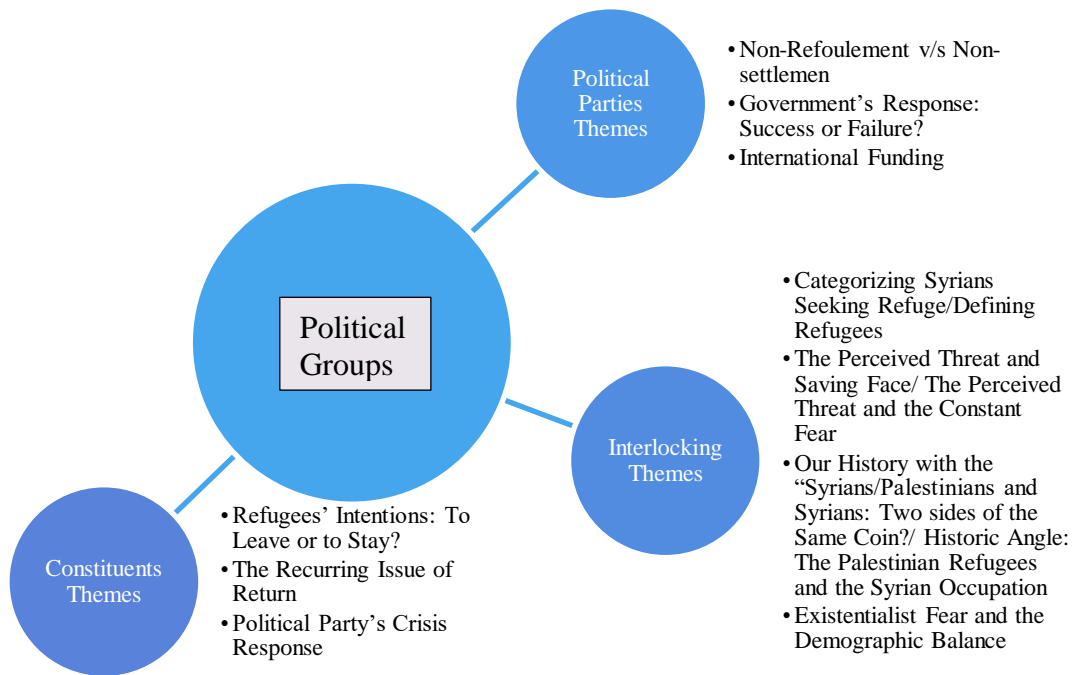
Chapter Seven has thus focused on the different themes and the variations in responses of different respondents to the questionnaire within the same political party and across different parties. In general, there was no unified definition for refugees in Lebanon which made it harder to understand and conceptualize the other referring to Syrian refugees. Most respondents were skeptical about Syrian refugees’ intentions in Lebanon because they have already seen a refugee case scenario with the Palestinian refugees. Respondents also draw striking parallels between the Syrian refugees and the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. The threat narratives have also intensified as different respondents expressed fear based mostly on what they have heard and sometimes on what they have experienced. Respondents also thought their experience with Syrian refugees could have been different if it had not brought back the memories of the Syrian occupation. Respondents also thought that their party is either doing nothing to address the crisis, or doing what it can within its means and reach, or doing all what is within its power to address the crisis. The following table summarizes those themes.

**Table 2***Constituents' Key Themes*

<b>Constituents' Key Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>
#1- Defining Refugees	Constituents had no unified definition for refugees in Lebanon making it very hard to conceptualize the "other".
#2- Refugees' Intentions: To Leave or to Stay?	Refugees' intentions were divided between those who saw their intention was to stay and become part of the Lebanese fabric, and others who saw their stay to be temporarily until they are able to go back home.
#3- Palestinians and Syrians: Two sides of the Same Coin?	Constituents compared Syrians to Palestinian refugees regardless of whether they were pro or against the Assad regime.
#4- Threat Narrative and the Constant Fear	Constituents' threat narratives are intensifying on the political, economic, and security front towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
#5- Political Party's Crisis Response	Constituents' perception towards their party's response varied between those who thought they are not doing anything, doing what they can, and doing all they can.
#6- The Recurring Issue of Return	Respondents agree that Syrian Refugees need to leave Lebanon and return to their home country.
#7- Our History with the "Syrians"	Constituents were reminded of the Syrian occupation with the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT – DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK LOOP**

The Syrian crisis spillover into Lebanon is complex and layered with tragedies and political agendas that have influenced the host community-refugee relationship and the perception of the other. Lebanon's past refugee experience, its system of power and patronage, and the Salafi-jihadist organizations such as ISIS and Al Nusra who fought with the Lebanese Army among other security and stability incidents have contributed to the system of refugee-precarity in Lebanon. The following discussion aims to analyze the data to answer the main research question: What is the general understanding of the Syrian Refugee crisis, regarding the categories of identity and difference, from the perspective of Lebanese political groups? Based on the above thematic analysis, key political parties' themes and key constituents' themes intersect in certain respects. Key political party themes are as follows: categorizing Syrian Refugees, non-refoulement v/s non-settlement, existentialist fear and the demographic balance, threat narrative and saving face, historic angle of the Palestinian refugees and the Syrian Occupation, and the success or failure of the government's response. For key constituents, the themes are: defining refugees, refugees' intentions, Palestinians and Syrians, the threat narrative and the constant fear, and the political parties' crisis response. Figure 18 below summarizes all the complex and interlocking themes between political party representatives and questionnaire participants.



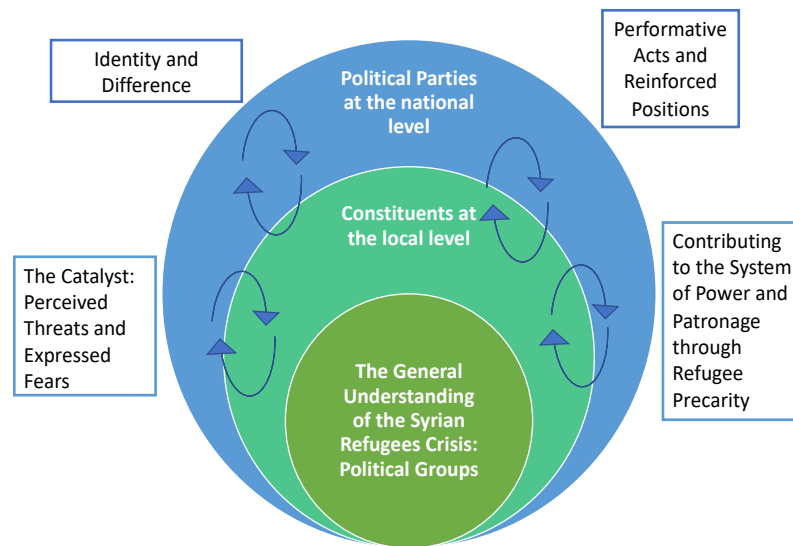
**Figure 18**

*Complex and Interlocking Themes*

The current chapter provides an analysis of these themes in combination with the background research to look into trends and patterns that have shaped political groups' understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis. I propose a framework that explains those patterns, trends, and manifestations derived from my thematic analysis. I call this framework: Refugee Precarity and the feedback loop.

The subject of understanding the Syrian refugee crisis from the perspective of political groups is at the core of the framework. The first loop around it is that of the constituents who may or may not have a political party ID and have voted for the political parties in the last 2018 parliamentary elections. Those political parties are, as described in

the introduction, also community proprietors influencing constituents at the local level while they also work at the national level in the government or its opposition. Though those two groups are different, the exchanges that occur between them and the constituents is a feedback loop that is subject to change within a highly delicate confessional system and a volatile conflict such as the Syrian spill-over which lead to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. Exchanges also happen among constituents themselves, but in this framework I focus on the parties' leadership and constituents in terms of electorates.



**Figure 19**

*Framework on Refugee Precarity and the Feedback Loop*

The framework offers a visual understanding of the crisis from the perspective of Lebanese political groups. The groups do not operate in a vacuum since they are influenced by many historic, socio-economic, geopolitical, and security layers of complexities and concerns. Hence, the following is a discussion of the themes in relation to this framework.

### **The Catalyst: Perceived Threats and Expressed Fears**

Threat narratives shape our response to the Other (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b). Not only do they shape our response of the other, but they also contribute to our creation of the “Self” which then creates boundaries between “us” and “them”. Consequently positions are formed contributing to a wider system in place. Those identities are formed and transformed in a dynamic manner as the Syrian refugee crisis evolves amidst Lebanon’s weak infrastructure and governance. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, different threat narratives have acted as a catalyst to this framework which then contributed to the current system of refugee precarity.

Both political parties and constituents describe their perceived threats and expressed their fears. One of the several expressed fears and threats is the impact on the economy. For the Lebanese constituents, Syrian refugees are presumably taking their jobs, they are creating “unhealthy” competition in the job market by providing the market with “cheap labor” and receiving international aid without paying any taxes. The constituents also explain that with the current inflation rate in Lebanon, international aid, as previously explained in terms of fresh dollars, amounts to more than what a struggling



Lebanese is making. Though most understood that the influx of refugees are not the reason behind the downfall of the Lebanese economy, they explain that the huge number of refugees has taken its toll on the Lebanese institutions, infrastructure of certain institutions, and also on their daily lives. While most of the respondents to the questionnaire did not have a solid story and a personal experience that would explain this stated perception of threat, the general belief was that the Syrian refugee crisis have done harm to their economy which causes personal challenges to them and to their future in Lebanon.

However, the Tashnag and the PSP did not see this issue as a threat. Tashnag party considered this fear an “exaggeration” and referred to their own experience of refugees which valued the pain refugees are going through. Their constituents; however, did not see the issue from the same angle. Though they understand the pain of being a refugee or coming from a refugee family, they explained that when they came to Lebanon they were not a burden to the economy and that they took part in expanding the local economy. PSP respondents were also “infuriated” and did not downplay their frustration though the PSP party placed the blame mostly on a dysfunctional government unable to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis rather than on the refugees themselves. They continued to explain that refugees need to be hosted and provided with their needs so that they could live in dignity until it is safe for them to return.

Using refugees as a political tool is no secret. The crisis of Syrian refugee has been exploited in Lebanese politics. According to the SSNP party, the crisis is used as a tool to put pressure on the Assad regime and to cast it as illegitimate because its citizens

fled their country and are not returning. Others such as the FPM are using it as part of their political campaign for re-elections. While they considered people calling them “racist” in need of an “education”, they are blaming the electricity crisis on refugees. Kataeb party also added that at some point even the waste crisis was partially blamed on refugees. Moreover, feeding on Lebanon’s delicate balance and its confessional system, refugees are also being used as a political tool to push against naturalization or any kind of integration. Since this is a very contentious and sensitive topic, as the LF interviewee explained, it was made very hard to pass a naturalization law by aiming for a 2/3 majority rather than a simple majority to pass this law. The fear of naturalization stems from this perception that if refugees are from a specific sect that gets naturalized then it will affect the numbers in the country of each sect and thus the sects will be gaining or losing leverage against the other. Since Lebanese do not trust each other and consider political parties their own safety net instead of seeking to apply the constitution after the Taef accords, refugees are still being used as a scapegoat instilling this constant fear of some other religion taking over the other and impacting the national pact and the 50-50 representation of Muslims and Christians in the parliament. FM representative has clearly stated that since the majority of the refugees are Sunni Muslims, there was a fear among the Christian community that this would change the demographic realities. This was confirmed by other Christian parties such as Marada, LF, FPM, and Kataeb. Even the PSP representing their Druze constituents considered a change in demographics is “not necessary”. Today, some parties, specifically Christian parties, are calling for a neutral official stance towards the Syrian crisis which calls on Hezbollah and their supporters to

disengage from the war in Syria and simultaneously create a civil and non-sectarian state. It seems that the agreement among all the major Christian parties on the subject matter stems for a real fear of a shift in demographics. Though Christians have had their fair share of power in government since before the Taef accords, they could never create or push for the civil state that they are now calling for. Now that the threat to their own sect has become more overt, they thought to come together and take a united stance. Hence, using refugees' as a political tool has also been one of Lebanon's long standing playing cards that has instilled fear through the perceived threats posed by refugees, especially those from different confessional backgrounds.

Security has also been a main concern. Lebanese respondents considered the presence of "foreigners" in their country a threat to their stability. They also blamed the increased levels of criminality such as theft and rape on the Syrian refugees. The threat perception is also derived from the Syrian war spill over into Lebanon which led to fighting between non-state actors and the Lebanese army in Aarsal. Though those may not be refugees and instead paid mercenaries or fighters, the local perception of Syrian refugees became more complex once the fear of them was generalized. Some respondents considered that the refugees were there to "occupy our" lands without differentiating between the fighters fighting alongside ISIS or al Nusra, which may or may not be Syrian and the Syrian refugees themselves. While I am not dismissing the possibility of some refugees joining those groups for material need or other personal desires, it seems like those threat narratives have shaped the host communities' perception of the other.

In brief, based on those threat perceptions, refugees were scapegoated, stigmatized, and used as a political tool contributing to a wider threat narrative across party lines and their constituents. They were labeled as “foreigners”, “thieves”, “criminals”, “rapists”, “terrorists”, and “Islamic radicals”. While political parties had their own positions and perceptions, constituents from Tashnag, Hezbollah, Amal, FM, LF, FPM, PSP, SSNP, Marada, and Kataeb all agree that Lebanon can no longer absorb the burden of refugees now threatening their day to day lives and influencing the locus of their moral order and underlying system of axiology. Through reports of violence and anecdotes that respondents claim they have heard about refugees being outlaws and criminals, fixed negative perceptions have solidified threat narratives and shaped collective perception and the understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis.

### **Identity and Difference**

As a nation, Lebanese have struggled in identifying who they are versus who they are not. There are those who seek to establish an identity and a feeling of belonging based on their sect, others who see Lebanon as part of Greater Syria Nation, and the rest who just want to have a Lebanese country embodied in its diversified social fabric. In order to understand how our identity have shaped our perspectives, it is important to look into how Lebanese have created their identity and how this identity plays a role in groups and communities, thus forming relationships and boundaries with the “other”. Based on the thematic analysis, we will look at the identity of the Lebanese victim, the chosen traumas, and their safety net in their creation of the self within the Syrian refugee crisis context. In addition to perceived threats, Lebanese are highlighting their victimhood and validating

their fear to construct a stronger foundation of negative externalization and thus building their knowledge of themselves and the other.

The Lebanese victims are victims of a corrupt government and, in this case and on different occasions as per the respondents' of the questionnaire, have been victimized by refugees who took their jobs, vandalized their country, and tapped into the resources that were supposed to be directed to them. While there was a general consensus regarding the government's inability to manage the Syrian refugee crisis, there was a general sense of victimhood for bearing the burden of this crisis. As put by the FM representative, "it is about taking care of our own" because we have had enough with others taking our resources when we "cannot sustain ourselves". While FPM representative also stated that Lebanese are becoming refugees in their own country, Kataeb also spoke about people feeling outnumbered by refugees. FM stated that they are "compounding" the problem by taking jobs not only in the formal, but also in the informal sector. Hence, refugees are seen to be taking advantage of Lebanon's resources and humanitarian aid disregarding the pains of the host community which seem much more hurtful and painful to locals than to refugees who are in all cases guests to the country. Therefore, Lebanese feel they are victims of a system that was unable to manage the Syrian refugee crisis and compounded their sorrows amidst a pandemic and one of the worst economic downfalls.

As developed by Vamik Volkan, the term chosen trauma embodies the state of Lebanese who are projecting from their past experiences with the Palestinian refugees to the Syrian occupation. Those experiences represent defeats and pains that Lebanese have been carrying because they have been ongoing traumas that have not been processed or

healed or even prioritized. Still, those shared reservoirs of past experiences and stories have influenced how Lebanese, in the formation of their own identity, have projected on the Syrian refugee crisis and created the other as they created the self by strengthening their group identity versus that of the threatening other.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, Lebanese have a history with the Palestinian refugees. For many Lebanese, Palestinians have used their land to fight Israel and have triggered the 1975 civil war and divided the country into two camps during that war. After the end of the civil war, as explained in Chapter 4, Palestinian refugees lived in refugee camps with minimal rights. The fear of naturalizing them or integrating them did not help their case. Today, Palestinian camps are seen as radicalized and threatening to the country that is weak with a government that has no control over those camps. Lebanese reactions to the Syrian refugees shows similarities to their reactions to the Palestinian refugee experience. These similarities are evident across board, regardless of whether the party is favorable or against the Assad regime with many Lebanese constituents believing that Syrian refugees are here “to stay” or “to occupy” our land just like Palestinians, who could not go back to their country. For many research participants, this also begs the question of whether Syrians will also carry arms and fight from Lebanon in the current war in Syria. Even though many affirm that both Syrians and Palestinians did not have a choice in fleeing their country, the general feeling is that Syrians will remain in Lebanon just like Palestinians did with no political solution in sight since 2011.

The other chosen trauma is that of the Syrian Occupation that ended with the killing of FM leader and former Prime Minister Rafik el Hariri and led to the Cedar Revolution. This was also considered more layered to the Lebanese Sunnis who saw this as a direct threat to their own being as equal partners in the Lebanese power sharing agreement. The Syrian occupation was brutal and Lebanese still remember the aggression of the Syrian regime in Lebanon at checkpoints, in kidnappings and torture, and are still calling for many missing Lebanese still detained today in Syrian prisons. One respondent explained that it was hard to interview asylum seekers when the person being interviewed spoke about their military service for the Syrian government reminding them of their own trauma caused by the Syrian army in Lebanon. Those pains and projections are real and Lebanese have been projecting since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis on the refugees themselves without differentiating between the Syrian government and the Syrian refugees. The Lebanese are viewing refugees' presence as another form of occupation. Even after realizing the difference, one respondent claimed that she still felt "neutral" with no feelings of empathy towards the Syrian refugees. At the emotional level, it has been hard for Lebanese to make a clear distinction between those who tortured, humiliated, and occupied them and those vulnerable refugees because of the same regime. One respondent even stated that she would have had more empathy towards them had they fought for justice alongside the Lebanese for those Lebanese still missing or still in prison in Syria disregarding the burden they themselves carry as they flee persecution.

This brings us to the safety net of the power sharing agreement. It comprises recurring exchanges between political parties and their constituents to instill within them the fear of naturalization and the fear of altering the confessional balance in Lebanon. This is because the political elites have depicted that any change in this balance would then lead to an existentialist war between all Lebanese sects. This transferrable fear has been exchanged from party representatives to their constituents and vice versa. It has also been exchanged between one party and another affirming their constituents' fears. Interestingly, probably because the parties are now divided between those who favor the Assad regime and those who don't, the representatives focused more on the Palestinian experience than the Syrian occupation while the constituents highlighted the Syrian occupation more than party representatives. The constituents of all the parties made a parallel construct and a clear comparison in their own words of the two experiences. Still, without really understanding how each party is addressing the Syrian refugee crisis, most constituents, fearing for their safety net, bluntly supported the political parties they last voted for in 2018 for the most part. Hence, as discussed in Chapter 5, according to Korostelina (Korostelina, 2007), the perception of threat and the creation of the self in relation to the "other" may arise from different factors which in this case focuses on perceived unequal economic conditions and socio-economic limitations, political positions of different parties representing different confessional backgrounds, holding other nationalities, and memories of previous events where the "other" is remembered as violent and hostile. This memory has little to do with the facts and more to do with identity shaping and a lot to do with which narratives are given prominence.



In the context of identity-based conflicts, threat narratives have considerable influence on the notions of the “self” and the “other.” Such narratives are centrality to the exaggerated differences between the Lebanese host community and refugees. Those stories we share about who we are and who they are become woven into our identity of self-promoting negative externalizations in this case of the Syria refugees by glorifying ourselves and looking down at the other. This internalization of who we are is also transferrable from generation to the other to renew and solidify the boundaries between “us” and “them” feeding on past traumas and wounds as mentioned in the previous section. This us-versus-them dilemma fosters favorable comparisons between the host community and the Syrian refugees. Those favorable comparisons pushes the in-group, in this case the Lebanese political groups, to view themselves as self-righteous and justify their acts no matter how moral or immoral they are towards Syrian refugees. For the Marada, for instance, the notion that going back and living under the Assad regime is risky to Syrians “is not convincing.” And refugees need to go back to their home country where according to FPM and SSNP interviewees, 90% of their land is safe. In this case, Lebanese political parties seem to have come together in a defensive strategy to protect their social identity in the face of the threats we have discussed in the previous sections of this Chapter.

In general, the creation of our boundaries with the other is layered and dynamic. What is interesting about the boundaries between Lebanese political groups and Syrian refugees is the inability of categorizing them and defining them. The boundaries of who “we” are versus who “they” are is blurry because the ingroup members are unable to

define them and have different opinions and perceptions on their intentions in Lebanon. If “we” cannot conceptualize the other, then what kind of boundary are we creating with the other? The other becomes a scary entity whose threat continues to grow creating a binary perspective of the good in-group and the bad-outgroup resulting in one acceptable resolution to the crisis and to this ingroup-outgroup relations. This acceptable solution is the return of Syrian refugees to where it is safe for them to return in their countries or on border areas where they can be organized and away from sight. In this binary perspective of good and bad, the bad overshadows the good and the need to push refugees to return to their country of origin becomes the most logical solution to the crisis at hand to protect the ingroup from the threatening outgroup.

From the perspective of the political parties, the ingroup, however, is in itself heterogeneous and representing different confessional backgrounds. The Shia Hezbollah and Amal respondents felt that their parties were the only protectors of their religion and the ones seeking justice and equality for them in the Lebanese community. The same has been portrayed by other respondents such as the PSP respondents who also thought the party will protect their existence in Lebanon. Christian parties had their own share of fear and also looked up to their parties to address the issue and keep them safe in Lebanon. All those ingroup differences were transcended in the case of Syrian refugee crisis and a united front of constituents asked for the refugees to return to where they could be safe in their country or on border areas. At this point the narrative also became binary where you are either with refugees and their human rights or you are patriotic and worried about your country from the risk of “foreigners”, “displaced”, “refugees”, “migrants”, and

“workers”. In the case where you view refugees in a more humane lens, you are also seen as traitor to your Lebanese identity, and in the case you view yourself as a patriot who deems one's nationality as a priority over the other, you are seen as a xenophobe. There seems to be no middle ground between those who view refugees with a humane perspective and those who focus on security, stability, politics, and usually the negative impact refugees have on the local economy.

The boundary divisions between the political groups and the Syrian refugees are intensified with notions that such refugees pose an existence threats to the groups. Those boundaries are also activated by political parties who seek to use refugees as a political tool to blame them from all their lack of governance and inability to lead Lebanon out of the dire economic conditions. This activation of boundaries between us and them along with the exchange and transfer of mythic narratives and existentialist fears differentiate social relations on each side of the divide. It does so by pursuing a shared united and representative front that is more empathetic to the ingroup than to the outgroup. Acts against Syrian refugees immortalizes the “criminal” other through acts of aggression, racism, and expulsion of refugees because it is the only way to save one's self. Questions regarding how to expel the other or “return” them are critical to notions of the main ingroup difference within political parties, but less emphasis was placed on safety by many constituents who responded to the questionnaire. This blending of “polis and value commitments” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 13) becomes the collective axiology of Lebanese political groups.

## **Performative Acts and Reinforced Positions**

After establishing who we are in the “us” vs “them” dilemma, Lebanese political groups have established their stance towards the Syrian refugee crisis. Those positions were manifested through deliberate performative acts on the local and national level. At the national and local level, Lebanon has established its position towards asylum, encampment, and naturalization. For Lebanese political groups, Lebanon is not a country of asylum, is against the establishment of refugee camps, and is totally against any form of naturalization of refugees. There is also no unified definition or understanding of who Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon are making it harder to address the issue when we are not able to define the subject matter.

Those positions have been reinforced through threat narratives, dissipating fears of demographic change, and while reminding Lebanese of their chosen traumas. Those positions have also been reinforced by ad-hoc rules and regulations since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis. The highlight of those rules and regulations was denying Syrian asylum seekers registration with UNHCR in May 2015 for no strategic reason after opening the borders since 2011 with no oversight or border management. The Lebanese government did so out of fears of showing the actual numbers of refugees as the local population started feeling frustrated with the mismanagement of the crisis and as their perceived threat has been intensifying. They have also reinforced the above stated positions through personal initiatives, as mentioned in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7, where political parties or official personnel such as Abbas Ibrahim take matters into their own hand, out of their official government roles, to find means to return Syrian refugees to

their home country. Those initiatives took place without any long-term government strategy to address the Syrian refugee crisis. The only potential strategy was a limited policy on return. It was not comprehensive in nature as it only focused on the return of refugees rather than addressing this crisis holistically. Consequently, those performative acts and reinforced positions feed into a disconnected governmental response to the crisis. This disconnect itself is purposely reinforced by the government's fractured system affirmed by PSP. PSP representative stated that the General Security followed on some matters, the Labor Ministry on others, and the Foreign Affairs Ministry on some other matters. The representative explained that the ministries were not interchanging information and collaborating together in order to address the Syrian refugee crisis. Each ministry, depending on whether it was led by a pro-Assad or anti-Assad elected party leader, positioned the Lebanese Government at different proximities of the crisis with no unified vision and strategic planning to look beyond political divides in order to address the subject matter.

In addition, regarding the FM representative, it was clearly stated that the Lebanese government deliberately calls the Syrian refugees displaced even if they are under UNHCR terms seeking asylum and refugee status. According to the representative, this is because it is one way Lebanon does not have to sign or abide by international agreements and international humanitarian law. The Lebanese government has also established itself as a no-asylum country whether they took the position of non-refoulement or non-settlement as explained in Chapter 7. Whether political parties have advocated the refugees' safe return when possible, return to safe border areas, or return at

any cost to Syria, political groups have cast Lebanon as a transit country where Syrian refugees, just like others, have no rights and no reason to look forward to staying or building a life in Lebanon. By retaining the notion of their “right to return”, Lebanese political groups are resurrecting memory of the Palestinian refugees experience where, as described in the framing of the issue, Chapter 1, has been used to establish a position of support towards refugees whose right is to return to their land all while giving them no rights to live in dignity because then this would pursue them to stay in Lebanon instead of going back. Therefore, from the perspective of the political groups, “we” don’t define them or categorize them, “we” don’t give them a specific space or a camp to shelter, and “we” look at ways to send them back to their country under the pretext of “their right to return” through a refugee policy focusing only on return to address the Syrian refugee crisis at the national level. All of the above is occurring as political parties position themselves as the moral compass of their constituents and their protectors while those protected further establish boundaries and positions by expelling Syrian refugees from their villages whom they perceive as threatening to their own existence, thus making all those actions acceptable, glorious, and a necessary evil to manage the Syrian refugee crisis.

In sum, each political group has positioned itself at a certain proximity from the Syrian refugee crisis, and all took a unified position when it comes to the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Such a collective and unified front against the presence of Syrian refugees seems to be the main stance established by both political parties and constituents regardless of their own intergroup relations and perceptions of each other.

Performative actions that have been claimed by Lebanese political groups have positioned them against the Syrian refugee crisis, but have not designed any clear framework to address the subject matter, partly because of the complexity of the crisis, but also because the Lebanese government has been unwilling and unable to address the crisis and prefers to keep up with its performance and use the crisis as a tool of attraction to their constituents. The triad of position/act-action/storyline reinforces itself through performative acts in a system of power and patronage that contributes to refugee precarity.

### **Contributing to the System of Power and Patronage through Refugee Precarity**

The Lebanese system of power and control contributes to refugee precarity. The system of power and patronage has long been managed by government practices stemming from an informal and fractured government system. Through this system, political parties and key stakeholders manage refugees in their local communities and at the national/state level. They also pressure them to return as they help shape their perception of voluntarily repatriation by scapegoating and stigmatizing them with threat narratives to their presence in Lebanon.

In this system of power and patronage, performative acts are manifested through deliberate ad-hoc rules and regulations and a collective axiology where the catalyst and the threat narrative is preserved, reinforced, and strengthened to sustain this system which contributes to refugee precarity. This ambiguity and precarity makes it harder to put the blame on the Lebanese government and its institutions when it comes to the Syrian refugee crisis. It also makes it harder to track international aid and assistance when there is no government body overlooking how the money is spent and no blame can be put on one entity because non claim to be in charge of the

process. The government promotes a culture of precarity and ambiguity to use refugees as a bargaining chip and a leverage in its internal politics in addition to its alliances in the region as described in Chapter 4. This is how the government would prioritize certain humanitarian or political agendas, decline asylum reforms or the signing of international conventions such as the 1951 convention with its addition 1967 protocol, and find creative means to govern refugees and control them while strengthening their grip on power. This strategy of ambiguity is not only used with refugees but has definitely impacted host community-refugees relationship in Lebanon. The perception of the other has been developed and sustained in an effort to drive a national state policy or the lack thereof on refugees to keep the perception of threat lingering while state apparatuses and political leaders play the role of guardian angel. This is all happening at the expense of refugees' right to live in peace and dignity until a political solution and a practical solution is found.

Established party positions have thus influenced their constituents at times, but at other times challenged those positions. While Lebanese political groups may understand to varying degrees the viscous cycle of power and patronage in Lebanon, they are less concerned about its contribution to refugee precarity and how this has influenced their perception of the other. They all believe that the Syrian refugees' should aspire a return to their home and that their needs should not be prioritized over local needs and concerns. As the groups create themselves in relation to the other, establish boundaries and state their position towards the Syrian refugee crisis, this system of power and patronage contributing to refugee precarity is impeding national healing and supporting Lebanese victimization and systematically reinforcing threat narratives which is giving space for scapegoating and othering. Hence, the framework presented in the



figure above for thinking through the key themes and their analysis contributes to our understanding of refugee precarity and how Lebanese political groups have identified themselves versus the other with respect to categories of identity and difference towards the Syrian refugee crisis.

## **CHAPTER NINE – CONCLUSION**

### **Concluding Thoughts and Implications to the Field**

My research aims to answer the following question: What is the general understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis with respect to categories of identity and difference, from the perspective of Lebanese political groups? The general understanding of the crisis is layered with tragedies, complexities, and embedded in a multilayered geopolitical context. This dissertation has focused on Lebanese political groups and how different groups see the crisis from their own angle. At times, they seemed homogeneous as a group, but most of the times data findings showed a wide variance between political parties interviewed and respondents to the questionnaire who themselves had different understandings of the crisis among themselves and in relation to other respondents supporting other political parties.

The central themes are presented in Chapter 7. Those are defining and categorizing refugees, their intentions, the notion of non-refoulement vs non-settlement, the fear of naturalization and changing the delicate demographic balance in Lebanon, the historic angle that created parallel constructs between the Palestinian experience and the Syrian occupation in answering questions on the Syrian refugee crisis, the chosen traumas, and the victimhood of Lebanese political groups all wrapped up in a confessional system where parties provide the safety net as long as they can stay in power. It is noteworthy to reiterate that the Lebanese government response has been fragmented and perceived as a failure by the participants of this research. This is because the Lebanese government has purposely responded to the Syrian refugee crisis in a disoriented manner without clear direction. In the meantime, the government

has sought international funds to sustain governmental infrastructures and provide humanitarian aid which is sometimes perceived as biased in favor of refugees and against the struggling Lebanese laborer who has to pay taxes and compete with “cheap” Syrian labor in the market. Keeping the definition of refugees vague and ambiguous has helped in the creation of the threatening other whom Lebanese political groups are unable to clearly define so they form their creation of the other based on an existentialist fears. Those are used as political tools by projecting on refugees, through a system of power and patronage that would allow for any moral or immoral measure to be taken in order to protect the self. All of which contributes to the deliberate lack of response and lack of a targeted strategy or comprehensive migration policy by the central government to address the Syrian refugee crisis at the local and national level.

This research examined the relationship between the host communities and refugees in terms of categories of identity and difference. The categories exhibit layers of complexity to ingroup identity, the outgroup other, and the boundaries created between Lebanese political groups and host communities. In this case, host communities’ perception of threat in relation to Syrian refugees have intensified, while the government’s weak response to the crisis and its inability to function coherently has been suppressed in a highly volatile context, amidst a pandemic, and unprecedented inflation rates in Lebanon.

This framework may be useful as a conceptual model for other conflict settings. Peacebuilders might deploy this framework for entry points to intervene in this conflict, depending on their areas of expertise, and address the struggles and concerns contributing to the current host community-refugees relationship which is feeding into a vicious cycle

of fear, threats, and negative externalizations in local communities and at the national level. These struggles and concerns are key because they may or may not mobilize one group to act against the other through violence or other manifestations. Hence, deconstructing those layers of identity salience and challenging different boundaries and performative positions is key to finding a peacebuilding arrangement that would work for all parties involved. Promoting self-reflection, awareness, and the acquisition of knowledge are also crucial for framing the Syrian refugee crisis from the perspective of political groups moving forward. Healing the wounds of history and the trauma compounded with a serious and comprehensive refugees' strategy may deem necessary to contribute to addressing the Syrian refugee crisis. A Lebanese national narrative recreated through peacebuilding initiatives and strategies to address the Syrian refugee crisis will help Lebanese political groups understand the link between their creation of the threatening other and their behavior towards them.

### **Recommendations**

There are several recommendations that may help address the Syrian refugee crisis from the perspective of Lebanese political groups. On the national level, political parties need to realize that using Syrian refugees as a political tool may backfire. The way to go forward about it is with an authentic self-reflection of who Lebanese are and who Syrian refugees are by differentiating between the Syrian regime and the Syrian refugees fleeing that regime no matter on what side of the divide one is. The proper response to the crisis also calls for a national dialogue to promote reconciliation with the past atrocities resulting from the ongoing Palestinian experience in Lebanon and the past Syrian

occupation that have led to the projection of fears and pain towards Syrian refugees. This is not an easy endeavor because it requires the nation to tap into its sources of resilience to find a durable solution to the Syrian refugee crisis while understanding the complexities and layered tragedies of the subject matter. Those will also entail putting together a commission that can coordinate with the Syrian government the return of Lebanese still imprisoned in Syria today to seek justice through the process of reconciling with one's past and addressing negative externalizations. This has proven to be difficult, but should not be dismissed or else we will only be looking into a viscous cycle where host communities are feeling injustices from the past in addition to the present burden they carry. Hence, this should begin with reassessing the Syrian refugee crisis, recounting the number of refugees in Lebanon by allowing UNHCR to continue its work and expand its current database so the real numbers can highlight the current need and resources needed. Therefore, finding a durable solution through a responsible and accountable government body to address the crisis is much more important than rushing Syrian refugees to return to their country of origin or to border areas. Those decisions need to come after a comprehensive research involving key stakeholders to design and develop a comprehensive policy on Syrian refugees that could frame the issue at hand, define and categorize Syrian as refugees, and provide for them their basic needs under international law and secure the notion of non-refoulement. Such a policy would also include improved administration of aid from the international community who can hold this government body accountable for the allocation of funds.

Reconciliation cannot be achieved without regional and international support. Host communities cannot manage the crisis on their own. Regional and international powers should rigorously seek a diplomatic and political solution to the current Syrian crisis and its spill-over in neighboring host communities. Disengaging and separating Lebanon from the war in Syria is also key to promoting the concept of Lebanon as a neutral country. Though it will be hard for Hezbollah to be persuaded to disengage, international stakeholders and other regional key players need to incentivize them or pressure them to do so. Any international initiative to return Syrian refugees to their country of origin or any other durable solution needs to undergo international supervision and needs to be administered by UNHCR in collaboration with the Lebanese Government to insure the safety and security of both host communities and refugees alike. A plan for Syrian refugees in Lebanon to return to their country needs to be safeguarded by key players in the conflict, however, Lebanon does not need to wait for a regional strategy to address the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and their potential voluntarily return. Lebanon can still push for a rights-based agenda that could secure the rights of refugees while appreciating the limits of resources and the burdens host communities are carrying. A strategy to address their return in Lebanon requires international support, but does not necessarily require neighboring countries to address the crisis the same way Lebanon is.

On the local level, host communities need to talk more about the atrocities of the past. They need to recreate the narrative about the past especially when it triggers so much trauma and pain currently projected on Syrian refugees. Healing the wounds of history also requires an introspection on who we are today and how much of our

perception is influenced by threat narratives that have pushed us to create those boundaries with the other. Host communities must also realize that their struggles and pains are also being used to feed the system of power and patronage in Lebanon. Constituents need to realize that the political parties they vote for make a big difference on their national strategies in relation to the Syrian refugee crisis and the many other challenges in Lebanon. Electing an official based on a valuable political agenda may seem to be a faster path to a durable solution than reinforcing their power and their deliberate system of refugees precarity. The next 2022 parliamentary elections will be crucial on several fronts as Lebanon becomes poorer and increasingly corrupt.

In sum, there is no direct solution. The solution is multi-layered, but is not impossible to reach with proper design, development, and implementation of a coherent and comprehensive strategy headed by a centralized governing body that could be held accountable with respect to addressing the Syrian refugee crisis. It all starts with our examination of the self so we could make meaning and links between the creation of the self and the other that have led to rigid positions through performative acts and manifestations of power and agency over Syrian refugees. This is not dismiss the burdens host communities are enduring or seeking to integrate Syrian refugees in Lebanon, instead this is about understanding how the narrative we create can be manifested at the local and national level. Constantly questioning and challenging boundaries and positions is a mean to grow as a country and as a nation.

For future research, the framework I call Feedback Loop and Refugee Precarity can tap further into more details on ad-hoc laws and regulations impacting both host

communities and refugees alike. The framework may also include other stakeholders of relevance and place political parties in a wider national setting with geopolitical considerations. The study and the framework may also further research shifting perceptions of threats and boundaries depending on age, gender, educational background, or more detailed sectarian backgrounds. In my study, I examined political groups who have voted for traditional political parties up until the last 2018 parliamentary elections. Several claimed they no longer vote and support those traditional political parties and the upcoming 2022 parliamentary elections may also display a shift in perceptions among Lebanese political groups. Electorates might start looking into less sectarian political parties to support and may themselves influence those dynamic boundaries that can contribute to the system of power and patronage influencing refugee precarity. In the understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis, future research may consider other stakeholders to participate in research embodying the international community, development and/or humanitarian agencies, and regional governments who could also be involved in the Syrian crisis itself and have vested interest in influencing the Syrian refugee crisis. Further research may look into a comparative study between the impact of Syrian refugees' crisis from the perspective of parties and constituents across different countries or regions and how those are manifested in terms of boundary creations and performances. The plight of refugees everywhere remains significant and legitimate and is worth digging deeper into. Host communities have also had their fair share of carrying the burden of hosting, mostly involuntarily, and have had their own wounds to heal in the



process. Looking at how those relationships may compare or evolve over time can also contribute to the literature.

In conclusion, the framework through which we shape our self, our identity, and that of others influences our perceptions of the other. While one identity may be more salient than the other, in the case of Lebanese political groups and Syrian refugees, it seems that a united front has been established across Lebanese political groups to rush Syrian refugees' return and to focus on their own difficulties and struggles at the local and national level instead.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Cynthia Nassif is a research associate at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington and a Fulbright scholar. She developed a deep understanding of the Middle East and North Africa region while working with several U.N. agencies and international organizations on conflict prevention, infrastructures of peace, and crisis recovery in New York and Beirut, Lebanon. Nassif previously led capacity development initiatives for an international organization in Beirut working on Syria to impact strategy and programming by focusing on a holistic, conflict-sensitive strategy to humanitarian assistance in the field amid rising tensions. In addition, she has analyzed and assessed refugee cases in the Middle East and North Africa region for the purpose of refugee status determination and has facilitated several trainings and circles on conflict resolution and trauma healing in conflict-affected settings for youth groups across Lebanon. Nassif's research focuses on violent manifestations with the objective of developing context-based approaches to addressing protracted conflicts in the region and informing policy.

Her research highlights radicalization, identity, systems of axiology, and systems thinking. She holds an MA in conflict transformation, with an emphasis on strategic peacebuilding, from Eastern Mennonite University and a BA in international affairs and political science, with an emphasis on economics, from the Lebanese American University in Beirut.