Municipalities and Forced Migration: From “Voidness” to Securitization.
The Case of Lebanon

By
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in International Affairs

School of Arts and Sciences
April 2019
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Municipalities and Forced Migration: From “Voidness” to Securitization

The Case of Lebanon.

Frederic Mourad

Abstract

After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Lebanon has witnessed large-scaled displacement from Syria. Though Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Convention, it has always been a refugee hosting country. However, with a number of almost 1.1 million Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - at the time of writing - and much more who are unregistered, Lebanon has now the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. This unprecedented mass influx happened in a context of policy divergences and worsening security. Against this background, tensions between host and refugee communities have been on the rise. The absence of an asylum framework and the existing loose policy framework on how to deal with the incoming influx of refugees have exacerbated the situation of the country already grappling with various endemic constraints. Indeed, Lebanese political parties are divided into two major camps, each of which holding divergent policy stances towards governance issues and foreign policy priorities including Syria’s neighboring conflict. In a context of divisions, municipalities have been able to develop adhoc measures to deal with refugees, framing them as threats on the different economic, ecological, and societal sectors. Notwithstanding this, little research tackles the securitization of refugees by municipalities in Lebanon. This thesis examines how municipalities have portrayed Syrian refugees as a threat to their internal security in order to apply measures that would not have normally applied in the immigration field. To that end, it draws on the theoretical framework of securitization that was first advanced by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies to explain the politics of securitization applied by municipalities in Lebanon on refugees. In this light, the thesis explores the various sequences of the securitization process, starting with how municipalities were able to frame refugees as an existential threat, then moving on to how they suspended normal politics and took extraordinary actions to deal with the so-called “threat. Finally, the thesis explains how constituencies have generally internalized this discourse, making the securitization process possible. Notwithstanding prevalent acts of securitization, the thesis accounts for counter-narratives in the public spheres that have sought to undo securitization.

Keywords: Security, Securitization, Syrian Refugees, Municipalities, Speech Act
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Introduction and Background

Syrian refugees and the Lebanese context since the Syrian crisis

Since 2011, the Syrian civil war has resulted in more than 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 7.6 million people internally displaced and around 5.5 million people fleeing to neighboring countries.\(^1\) This humanitarian catastrophe, has led to an unprecedented flow of refugees since World War Two. The map in Figure 1, taken from the UNHCR, shows the distribution of the registered Syrian refugees who stayed in adjacent countries in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA region).\(^2\)

Keeping in mind that there is a lot more Syrian refugees who are unregistered with the UNHCR, it is fair to say that Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan have dealt with challenges of multiple nature such as social, security and economic challenges, brought by the refugees to the hosting countries. This is especially true in a small country like Lebanon, where major economic crises are accompanied by a deep sectarian divide that has been fueled

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\(^2\) Ibid
by the Syrian conflict. Furthermore, previous experiences with the huge numbers of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees has also shaped how the Syrian Refugee crisis has been handled. In fact, during the Israeli-Palestinian war, 449,957 refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Lebanon, and an even bigger number of refugees entered the country but were unregistered. Also, during the Iraqi war, around 50,000 Iraqi refugees fled to Lebanon. In the next chapters, I will shed the light on the role that these previous crises have played in modeling the current one. Adding on, it is important to note that Lebanon has neither signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. Consequently, it is not an asylum country, but it grants temporary protection to refugees and asylum seekers instead. Despite that fact, Lebanon is currently holding more Syrian refugees than any other European country.

To continue, the arrival of Syrian refugees has not affected Lebanese regions equally.

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4 Ibid


6 Ibid
Figure 2 and 3: Distribution of Syrian refugee per governorate in Lebanon-UNHCR 2015

The chart and map taken from the UNHCR figures above show that most Syrian refugees reside in the Bekaa Valley and the Northern regions of Lebanon, which are considered the poorest regions in the country. In these regions, tensions between host communities and the Syrian refugees have been exacerbated due to various problems, such as price inflation of rent and basic commodities, competition over job opportunities, the overcrowding of education and healthcare services and the increase in garbage that has resulted from the large quantity of Syrian refugees residing in these same areas. The tension is also a result of the sectarian divide that has been present in Lebanon since Syria’s civil war due to the fact that the Lebanese citizens are supporting different sides in the Syrian war. Indeed, the Shia are rooting for the Syrian government and the Sunni are rooting for the opposition which has led to a lot of friction between both sects in

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Lebanon. Since most Syrian refugees are Sunni, their arrival fueled the sectarian divide even further.\textsuperscript{10} In fact, the geographical distribution of Syrian refugees has followed a sectarian pattern with Lebanese Sunni regions offering shelter to Sunni Syrian refugees and Christian regions offering shelter to fellow Christians and Alawites.\textsuperscript{11} All of these challenges have left the Lebanese hospitality at a breaking point and have put the government under a lot of pressure. In the midst of all the chaos that had resulted from that large influx of refugees and from the crippling of the Lebanese government, municipalities took a leading role in dealing with daily refugee affairs. The way municipalities started reacting with the refugees was not homogenous. Indeed, while some municipalities –mainly in Sunni areas– welcomed them with open arms and treated them similarly to Lebanese citizens, other municipalities –mainly in Christian and Shi’a areas– shifted the refugees’ status from ”victims”, ”brothers” and ”neighbors in need”, to a ”burden” and a ”security threat” as they were fearing for their stability and survival. In order to deal with that threat, they increased security measures by imposing policies such as curfews, evictions and other measures rendering the Syrians’ legal status in Lebanon impossible.\textsuperscript{12} Drawing on the theory of securitization which can be defined as a process


or method composed of three different stages where state actors frame subjects as “existential security threats” in the eyes of an audience, then adopt “extraordinary measures” in the name of “eliminating that threat” and finally the audience “internalizes the necessity of taking extreme measures to survive against perceived threats”\textsuperscript{13}, this thesis argues that some of the Lebanese municipalities have indeed securitized the Syrian refugee issue. Given that scant attention that has been dedicated to understanding the processes of securitization that Lebanese municipalities have applied, this thesis will explore in detail how municipalities successfully resorted to securitization measures to manage the refugee issue. The thesis thus argues that some of the municipalities in Lebanon, securitized the Syrian refugees in order to make sure the strict security measures they impose on them will lead to their departure from the country.

**Research question:**

Against this backdrop, the thesis will unpack the following research question: In the absence of a coherent national framework, what are the dynamics and components of the refugee securitization process that Lebanese municipalities have developed? The thesis will in that regard address a series of sub questions inspired from the securitization theory: What measures were taken by municipalities to enable the securitization of migration? How did these measures suspend “normal politics”? How did the Lebanese audience internalize this security discourse? And what were the implications of security measures for shaping the politics of forced migration for both refugees and host communities?

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Methodology:

Method of Analysis:

In order to show how some of the municipalities in Lebanon have securitized the Syrian refugee issue, this thesis draws primarily on a qualitative case study analysis. Methods encompass policy review of stakeholders’ statements, media mapping of the discourse on Syrian refugees, a thorough literature review of what has been written on Lebanon’s national and municipal policy making towards displaced persons from Syria, and a collection of semi-structured interviews with policy makers and experts.

I will draw on a functional discourse analysis to explore the statements of municipal actors, shedding the light on how language carries strategic importance and impact in policy making.\(^{14}\) This analysis has been chosen in particular due to the fact that it fits with the theoretical framework of securitization. It allows us to highlight how language can be used to shape policy-making and manipulate a political understanding of a certain situation. Discourse analysis has thus the aim of making note of what is written and what is implied, and it focuses on emotional contexts, both the emotive and pejorative ones.\(^{15}\)

For the sake of collecting primary data and information from the people involved, I held twelve semi-structured interviews with key personnel in municipalities which have undertaken different types of security policies, questioning them about their everyday


\(^{15}\) Ibid P. 351-352
practices and the reasons behind them. Examining daily activities according to Bigo, can reveal special deviations from official policies that would highlight the securitization even more. Additionally, I conducted interviews with UNHCR External Relations Officers and researchers from the Carnegie Center in the Middle East in order to better understand point of view on the matter. Finally, the case study will be a sample of eight municipalities from different governorates all over Lebanon to show that the securitization of Syrian refugees did not only happen in one Lebanese area. The municipalities chosen were the following:

The Municipality of Zahle representing the Bekaa governorate, Halba representing the Akkar governorate, Baalbek representing the Baalbek Hermel governorate, Dekwene and Bourj Hammoud representing the Mount Lebanon governorate (to have both the Matn and Greater Beirut district demonstrated), Kfar-Rimman representing the Nabatieh governorate, Mezyara representing the North governorate and Baysarieh representing the South governorate. These municipalities have been specifically chosen due to the large percentage number of refugees in their cities, and their transparency when it comes to the Anti-Refugee policies being implemented, given the fact that others municipalities have been unofficial about their policies.

Indicators of securitization:

To measure the securitization of migration, a list of indicators has been developed. According to scholars such as Huysman “migration can be rendered as a security question by being institutionally and discursively integrated in policy frameworks that emphasize policing and defense”.¹⁷ In the following, I will shed light on how municipalities integrated the forced migration of Syrian refugees into security policies. In order to do so, I will examine indicators similar to the indicators that Bourbeau has developed since, just like Huysman's indicators, they revolve around the themes of policing, defense, frameworks and institutions.¹⁸ They will be divided into two categories: institutional and security practices relating to the migration-security nexus. Regarding the institutional indicators, the following will be looked upon in each municipality:

- Important Immigration Acts or policies linking between migration and security;
- Whether migrants and refugees are listed as a security concern in policy statements and speech acts relating to security, immigration and foreign affairs; and
- Whether the municipality developed a specialized department that is in charge of national security where immigration is a key element.

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As for the second category of indicators, the following practices and policies will be drawn upon:

- The curfews and interdictions;
- The closing down of refugee run businesses; and
- The evictions and detention of immigrants.

All these indicators form an instrumental framework in the context of this study and emphasize policing and defense as Huysmans has pointed out. Below is a table of the list of indicators that seek to measure securitization of the refugee issue in different municipalities:

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<tr>
<th>Municipality/Indicator of securitization of migration</th>
<th>Zahle</th>
<th>Halba</th>
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<td>Immigration Acts or policies linking security to migration</td>
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<td>Migration and refugees listed as a security concern in policy statements and speech acts that relate to security, immigration and foreign affairs</td>
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<td>Formation of a Specialized department that is in charge of national security where immigration is a key element</td>
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<th>Curfews and interdictions</th>
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<td>Closing down of Syrian-run businesses</td>
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<td>Evictions and detentions of refugees</td>
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**Instrumentation:**

The questionnaire for the interviews that I have conducted was specifically designed and developed for the purpose of understanding the municipalities’ point of view regarding the events that happened after the arrival of Syrian refugees. The interviewees targeted were chosen among key figures in each municipality chosen as a case study for the sake of this thesis. The questionnaire is made of three sections. The first one targeted the perception of Syrian refugees by the different chosen municipalities while the second focused on the challenges that Syrian refugees pose on the municipalities and the measures adopted by the latter in order to solve these challenges. As for the third section, it revolved around the legality of adopted measures and their popularity amongst the Lebanese citizens. Following the approval of the International Review Board, the sample questionnaire was used and the data collected was only used for the sake of the study.

Additionally, as will be explained in the first chapter, securitization is never fully successful until the audience internalizes the threat. Thus, in order to show that Lebanese municipalities did indeed succeed at securitizing Syrian refugees, I will draw on and analyze surveys conducted by research organizations such the Lebanese Center for Policy Research in collaboration with International Alert and by the Political Science Institute at
USJ in collaboration with UNHCR. This would help to acquire a clearer image of how Lebanese citizens perceive Syrian refugees.

**Thesis structure:**

Following the abstract and introduction, the thesis is divided into five chapters, the first of which is an analysis of the theoretical framework by the Copenhagen School, *the Securitization of forced migration*, which will be used throughout the thesis. The second chapter is a literature review on the migration-security nexus in Lebanon, delving deeply into writings of different scholars on the securitization of refugees in Lebanon throughout history on one hand, and on the aftermath of previous large influxes of refugees, on the other hand. The third chapter is divided into a general and municipal framework of Lebanon’s politics towards the Syrian refugees. The former is composed of the background of Lebanon’s political system with focus on municipalities, followed by the study of how Lebanese policies shifted from humanitarian to security-centered as the crisis evolved. Regarding the municipal framework, it goes over the methods and channels through which municipalities had dealt with Palestinians and Iraqi refugees in the past and then zooms in on the fact that municipalities became the governors of Syrian refugees, which allowed some of them to resort to securitization. The fourth chapter describes the securitization process by analyzing all the drivers and indicators of securitization in different case studies all over Lebanon in order to emphasize their success. The internalization of the threat by the Lebanese audience is shown along with a counter-narrative of how the civil society, International Organizations and a lot of Sunni municipalities have tried to de-securitize Syrian refugees. Finally, the last chapter includes a synthesis of all the findings presented in the thesis, such as how political elites
used securitization to scapegoat refugees for their own shortcomings in Lebanon and it concludes by shedding light on the importance that the Lebanese media had in framing Syrians as a security threat, which facilitated the securitization process.

**Limitations of methodology**

The limitations of the study are of both academic and methodological nature. First, the topic analyzed in the thesis is a relatively new one, which means that there is not a lot of available literature mainly when it comes to Lebanese municipalities securitizing refugees and reports that highlight the socioeconomic impact of refugees – especially in the selected case studies. As for the limitations from a methodology point of view, they can be divided into two parts. On the one hand, difficulties emerge when it comes to estimating an exact number of refugees residing in each of the selected municipalities. On the other, challenges arise when it comes to measuring the degree of the internalization of the threat by the Lebanese citizens. Therefore, there is a need for further both quantitative and qualitative research on the issue.
Chapter One

Theoretical framework: The securitization of migration

As already mentioned, this thesis draws on the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School and applies it to the case of a sample of municipalities in Lebanon with regards to the refugee issue. In this regard, focus will be laid on the speech acts that securitize migration and on the specific process of securitization immigration (forced in that case).

1.1 What is security?

To frame what security means and give it a definition, Buzan Weaver and De Wilde refer to the term in an international relations perspective where they explain that security should be seen as the survival of a nation or a state against an existential threat. However, there are multiple kinds of threats. Indeed, Weaver elaborates on the idea stating that threats to a state are not only the dangers of potential warfare, but they also include threats in terms of cultural identity where the language, culture, religion, national identity and customs of a state are in danger. Finally, Williams discusses the difficulty of defining a security threat is but he concludes that a societal security threat to a group could also be population movements and economic integration.

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21 Ibid
1.2 Development of Securitization theory by the Copenhagen School

Now that the definition of security has been explained, a proper definition of securitization would be one as follows: “the process of presenting an issue in security terms, in other words as an existential threat”\(^{23}\). Based on this definition, securitization involves a dimension of survival against an implied threat – something that would gradually legitimize taking actions to "survive". Nevertheless, ‘political leaders, bureaucrats, governments, lobbyists and pressure groups’ are the ones who mainly engage in securitization\(^{24}\).

In fact, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever wrote seminal books and articles developing the theory of securitization, and analyzing its components\(^{25}\). As such, they have stressed on how a delicate political problem can launch a discourse securitization, also elaborating on the reason behind this. In one of their articles, the aforementioned authors explain the process of "securitization and desecuritization" and they portray the mechanisms through which an area of policy becomes politicized and securitized. Furthermore, they show the evolution of security as a concept, from the Cold War onwards, all the while justifying this phenomenon.\(^{26}\) Also, Waever introduces the concept of “societal security”, which can


\(^{25}\) Ibid
be defined as encompassing the causes behind social securitization and the politicization of social elements. Moving along, light will be shed upon the role of non-state actors in the process of securitization, as emphasized by the Copenhagen School, and upon how these actors, combined with historical factors can amount to the politicization and securitization of a policy.

This leads us to ask: How does securitization exactly take place? Peoples and Vaughan-Williams speak of 3 stages within the securitization process:

1. The actor presents and exaggerates the presence of an ‘existential threat’, thus calling for ‘extraordinary measures’ and legitimizing their use in order to resolve the issue. Much emphasis is put on "speech act’ or ‘plot of securitization’; In fact, the actor evokes his/her ‘social and political capital’ to convince and persuade his/her audience of the credibility of his/her claim to an ‘existential threat’.27

2. The actor then demands the right to take any necessary action to deal with the threat.

3. Finally, the audience, convinced that the rule-breaking behavior of the actor in order to eliminate the threat is justified, "internalizes" the threat.28

Adding on, the history of the issue at hand has a role in either persuading or dissuading the audience of the urgency to resort to extraordinary measures. Indeed, if the issue has been problematic in the past, the audience is more likely to adhere to the claim of existential threat, igniting in the audience a ‘historical hostile sentiment’. Finally, the more

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credibility the actor has in the eyes of the audience, and the more credibility and the history of the issue are intertwined, the more the audience will believe and adhere to his/her claims. If the historical background is not solid, then the actor’s role becomes more challenging in terms of building a tenuous case for his/her cause. However, whether an issue will be regarded as a threat or not is very much dependent on the framing of that issue.29

1.3 Securitization beyond Speech Act:

The “Paris School” of security studies gives another approach to securitization and goes beyond the theory advanced by the Copenhagen School and the importance it stresses on speech act. Indeed, prominent scholars of the Paris School such as Bigo and Balzacq argue and criticize that the Copenhagen school’ approach on securitization focuses too much on speech act while neglecting the fact that it is mainly through policy tools that security practices are enacted.30 This means that, in order to examine how securitization exactly takes place, one should focus on how institutions are acting instead of only relying on the words that are being used while discussing an issue. Actions are as, if not more important than words due to the fact that since words and speeches – or the discourse – employed by organizations and states can be intentionally misleading in order to manipulate an audience, while actions are solid and definite acts that cannot be changed and thus reflect


the true motivations behind them.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore, an institution or state can securitize an issue just through its actions. If the intended audience views the action as being out of the ordinary but necessarily so, then the issue has been securitized.

1.4 \textbf{Securitization of Forced Migration:}

More specifically, when it comes to the securitization of migration, one of the first authors to link security and migration was Buzan from the Copenhagen school in 1991. Also, this phenomenon first appeared during the Cold War when Voelkner argued that, since the overflow of migrants from East Germany led to the downfall of the Berlin Wall, population flows pose a threat to the security and stability of Nation-States.\textsuperscript{32} Adding on, the framing of migrants as a security issue is mostly linked to the media, but there are several examples where it has also been used by politicians and policy makers through their personal party or government websites, often in order to reorient people's thinking about an issue and make them interpret and perceive events in a specific way.\textsuperscript{33} In other words, policy makers and politicians frame migrants as an existential threat instead of a simple unease that can be easily dealt with in order to get the full support of their communities.\textsuperscript{34}

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For example, looking into the Syrian crisis and Lebanese Municipalities, indicators pointing to the ‘plot of securitization’ should be applied within the concept of "speech act" in order to determine how migration was securitized. From this we can infer that what matters most is the role of the content in securitizing migration. Speeches delivered by politicians and municipality cabinets who rank high on the credibility scale should be analyzed because their presentation of the issue correlates with the impact on the audience and the discourse.

Referring to what has been already mentioned, the framework for securitization makes it clear that the degree of intensity of a threat does not need to rise to that of a traditional war; however, an existential threat needs to exist. This existential threat would then entail extraordinary actions, which might fall under traditional means of securitizing a country both politically and militarily.35 The Copenhagen School relays multitudinous types of security, one of which is societal security that consists in threatening the identity, the common language and the collective culture of a certain group. Peoples and Vaughan-Williams exemplify this through the refugee crisis; they posit that the flowing influxes of refugees is a potential threat to the security of the society due to the conflicting values of the host community and migrants, which will lead to rising tension between both parties. This is then framed as threatening to the existence and the day-to-day life of the host community. The speech act of politicians can in this case amount to a spillover, changing the discourse from that of an economic problem to that of the security of the society, thus

raising the bar of the threat.\textsuperscript{36} When we apply the concept of securitization on migration, authors like Huysmans who is much known in the field of securitization of migration, argue that, in order to get policies to pass on migration, it is necessary for politicians to get the necessary support. This is why they use particular frames such as how the presence of aliens or refugees will lead to a heightened sense of security threat.\textsuperscript{37} Husymans is also joined by Mehan in claiming that it is a lot easier for policy makers to promote political autonomy and unity by framing migrants as an existential danger that is very hard to deal with.\textsuperscript{38} Cehyan and Tsoukoula also show that politicians tend to refer to immigrants with very strong words such as “flood “and “invasion”. Also, politicians use not only the big number of refugees to securitize, but also highlight their cultural differences with the hosting state in order to draw an image of them as an existential threat.\textsuperscript{39} They only do so to cause fear among the public and make them more likely to accept and legitimize policies that they want to take. Finally, Jorgensen and Merit also join Huysmans in claiming that when there is a sudden increase in immigrants by numbers, governments tend to frame them as a danger to the labor markets, hence a danger to the survival of the


\textsuperscript{39} Ayse, Ceyhan and Anastassia Tsoukoula. (2002). "The Securitization of Migration in Western Societies: Ambivalent Discourses and Politics". \textit{Alternatives} 27 supplement P. 24
community, which causes popular unrest and thus allows the government to adjust its policies in order to fix this unrest.40

1.5 Securitization of forced Migration studies in the Middle Eastern Context

The securitization of migration in the Middle Eastern context is no novelty. Many scholars and experts have already analyzed its dynamics and manifestations. Fábos, for example, discusses how scholars in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Morocco, have shifted their research on refugees in Arab Countries from a human rights point of view to the concerns of the receiving countries, the populist anti-immigrant climate and how governments are manipulating the widespread anxiety over the new security threats resulting from refugees.41 Hilal and Samy also shed light on how Arab countries are afraid of refugee-derived conflicts, which makes them apply legal instruments and security-centered practices when dealing with forced migration, often neglecting human rights in the process. 42 Hanafi from his part explains that historically, political leaders securitized Palestinian refugee camps and transformed them into “areas


of security crises” and” states of exception” where normal politics, accountability and human rights were no longer important. Citizens were then convinced by decision makers that the way they were governing refugee camps was the only and “ideal” way. Samy joins him in underlining the importance of past experiences with refugees and argues that every Arab states’ perception of refugees has been heavily affected by the Palestinian crisis in 1948. She also sheds light on how Arab governments always determine their refugee policies based on security politics, which enables them to undertake ad hoc regulatory practices.

In the wake of displacement from Syria, Yahya argues that neighboring countries to Syria, such as Jordan and Lebanon, shifted from their humanitarian approach towards Syrian refugees at the beginning of the crisis to a security threat approach and started considering the fleeing population a burden on their national security instead of “guests”. In addition, Seeberg and Eyadat elaborate on the Syrian context of migration and how security measures and national interests of hosting countries are key factors in the framing of


Syrian migration. Moreover, Weinthal, Zawahri and Sowers argue that in Jordan, concerns about the influx of Syrian refugees led to the framing of migration as a security threat, which in turn allowed the government to securitize the issue.

Thiollet on her part, adds to this that Gulf countries securitize migrants and refrain from granting them rights such as access to healthcare and employment by claiming that if they were to stay in the country, they would start spreading ideas of rebellion. De Bel Air also states that the Gulf States shifted their policies after the Arab Spring and dealt with refugees and young Arabs as a security threat. She gives as an example how Lebanese were kicked out of the United Arab Emirates after being accused of sympathizing with Hezbollah.

1.6 Applying securitization theory to the case study

Against this backdrop, the thesis will focus on analyzing the discourses and practices that were adopted by municipalities and that led to securitization throughout the Syrian migration crisis. This thesis thus unpacks the process of securitizing the refugee issue

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46 Peter, Seeberg, and Zaid Eyadat. (2013). “Migration, security, and citizenship in the Middle East: new perspectives.” Springer


49 Françoise, De Bel-Air (2016). “Gulf and EU Migration Policies after the Arab Uprisings: Arab and Turkish Youth as a Security Issue.” Istituto Affari Internazionali
through the lens of the ‘framing’ of the crisis and through identifying the indicators that showcase how Syrian refugees were portrayed as “existential threats” at societal and economic levels. As shown above, the speech act constitutes, according to the Copenhagen School, one of the pillars of the process of securitization as it modifies the discourse and allows the integration of rhetorical frames borrowed from security and threats. Securitization however only ensues when the actor is successful in the eyes of the audience. As such, while politicians have the power to declare any issue as security threat, the success of securitization consists in convincing the community or population of the acuity of this threat. The discourse then shifts the discussion from normal to security politics. By constructing a ‘certain development as a security problem’, politicians justify to resort to extraordinary means to resolve the issue. By utilizing this securitization discourse, decision makers legitimize their use of any means necessary to remediate the matter, bearing in mind that sometimes the issue at hand might not be security-related at all. In other words, the actor making use of speech act acquires the ability to turn any area of policy into a matter of security. Drawing on these theoretical components, I will first show how municipal decision makers have securitized the refugee issue through speech acts and practices, elevating forced migration from Syria into a security threat. Second, I will show how they shifted from normal politics to ‘extraordinary measures’ by suspending refugees’ mobility and access to services and employment. Third, I will show that this politics of securitization has been internalized by the Lebanese audience.

50 Ole, Wæver. (1993) “Securitization and desecuritization.” Copenhagen: Centre for Peace and Conflict Research
51 Ibid.
In order to unpack the process of securitization, I will go back in history in order to show how Lebanese policy makers have dealt with other refugees such as Palestinians and Iraqis. This enables me to place the process of securitization in Lebanon’s context specific constellation of power and social relations.  

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Chapter Two

Literature Review: Analyzing the forced migration-security nexus in the Middle East

Now that I have discussed the theory of securitization that will be applied to my case study, I turn to how key scholars have problematized the politics of forced migration in Lebanon. The aim is to embed Lebanon’s refugee politics in its history so as to understand more clearly the migration-security nexus, and how securitization of refugee politics is to be embedded within longer-term policy legacies. Lebanon has been considered a land of refugees ever since its establishment, since it has hosted and provided shelter to Armenians, Iraqis, Palestinians and Syrians. However, refugees have hit Lebanon in a politically unstable context filled with wars, political violence and economic debt. The large influx of refugees has only added to the challenges that Lebanon faces. In fact, the arrival of so many refugees has increased the fear of unsettling the sectarian and demographic balance, endangering the economy and increasing terrorist acts in the country. Consequently, multiple ever-changing discourses and policies on the refugee crisis emanated, politicizing the issue and increasing its securitization.53 To start with, various scholars agree over the fact that Lebanon barely has a legal refugee regime and

that the country has a negative approach towards refugees. Indeed, different articles speak about the “institutional ambiguity” that governs refugees in Lebanon. Nassar and Stel on the one hand argue that it is not only the government’s limited resources and capacities or its dysfunctional political system that leads to this ambiguity but it also suits the government strategically to keep its policies ambiguous as it allows them to formalize their informal methods of dealing with Syrian refugees leading to their marginalization, fragmentation and securitization.\textsuperscript{54} Other scholars such as Kuusisto-Arponen and Glimartin build on the importance of having an ambiguous system by speaking about the political utility and political advantages of having what they call “precarious refugees” that are the result of “politico-administrative limbos”. These limbos help the state gain on both the political and socio-economic sectors.\textsuperscript{55} Adding on, Frangieh presents the argument that one of the few things that political powers in Lebanon agree on is their desire of an immediate return of Syrian refugees to Syria and that one of the main means for that to happen is the policy “gaps” and “evasions” that they are coming up with. He also notes that most of these policies revolve around the security nexus, which leave refugees afraid and feeling unwanted in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{56} The article presented by the previous authors fit with Foucault’s concept of biopolitics in securitization. According to him, securitization is more about control of populations by specific actors, as part of their government strategies and not speech act. By controlling certain people as a political


problem and excluding them for being dangerous, they increase and reaffirm their positions of power. Foucault adds that by characterizing refugees as threatening to the equilibrium, states can justify their need for greater regulations methods to stop the integration of refugees.\textsuperscript{57}

Other authors such as Ghanem, build on the importance of having informal policies to tackle the refugee issue by claiming that the "no-policy policy" that was adopted by the Lebanese government was chosen in order for the latter to remain as neutral as possible towards the Syrian crisis, given the big divide within the different political parties inside of Lebanon with one coalition supporting the Syrian government and the other supporting the opposition in Syria.\textsuperscript{58} Adding on, Levy and Shamiyeh also argue that the Lebanese state has made it a point to call the Syrians "guests" instead of calling them "refugees" in order to avoid international obligations that come with the term.\textsuperscript{59} Moreover, scholars such as Dionigi explain that the fact that Lebanon categorically refused the formation of Syrian refugee camps was a testimony to the country not wanting a future with Syrian refugees in it due to the traumatic experience that had happened with the Palestinian camps in the county and the security threats they pose to this day.\textsuperscript{60} This latest argument fits with the constructivist approach to securitization of Balzaczq, according to whom


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events are socially constructed. To elaborate, securitization happens as a result of ongoing interactions and processes throughout history.\(^6\) Thus, when going back to Lebanon’s history with refugee politics, Hanafi and Long for example, argue that throughout the Palestinian refugee crisis in Lebanon, the police and military have justified their behavior towards Palestinians using “security”, and that all Palestinian political activity was generally assumed to be a threat to the Lebanese state, which rendered a good Palestinian self-governance practically impossible.\(^6\) Delving more into the history of refugee politics in Lebanon, Haddad advances one of the most prominent issues that come to mind when discussing forced migration issues: Lebanon’s fear of the refugee’s settlement in the country or Tawteen. According to him, one of the main reasons why the Lebanese have a negative attitude towards the settlement of Palestinians in the country is their fear of the security threat they pose to the country especially after the violence and clashes that had erupted previously between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Christian right-wing political parties in the 1970s.\(^6\) Although most scholars agree on a general Lebanese resentment to the notion of Tawteen, scholars disagree on the main reason that leads to

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this resentment. Indeed, Nasrallah presents the idea that Lebanon’s approach to refugees in general is out of xenophobia and has a racist rationale behind it.\textsuperscript{64} Masalha on his part believes that the main reason behind the resentment of refugees staying in Lebanon is more of a socio-economic concern.\textsuperscript{65} Adding on, Levy and Shamiyeh also speak about the fear of a change in the Lebanese demography that is heightened whenever the possibility of having refugees settle in the country is perceived.\textsuperscript{66}

To continue, as previously mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, the Copenhagen School communicates a myriad types of security and several scholars speak about the dynamics of securitization in different sectors, such as the political, economic, military, societal and environmental sectors. Thus, we can conclude that even if scholars argue on what is the main cause for the resentment of the Lebanese people towards refugees, all their arguments revolve around the general migration-security nexus. This fear and resentment of Tawteen and how it might disrupt the demographic, economic, and sectarian balance has led to an increase of securitizing policies being adopted. As for the latest refugee crisis in Lebanon, the resentment and fear of having Syrian refugees settle in the country only exacerbated with the large influx and unprecedented number coming into the country. More importantly, the negative experiences and encounters with the Palestinian refugees have altered the psychological environment of how Lebanese

perceive the Syrian refugees. Indeed, in a quantitative study done by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International affairs on more than 2,000 Lebanese nationals to try and measure their feelings towards the Syrian refugees, the following results came up: 82% are against having a family member marrying a Syrian or a Syrian descendent, 88% believe that Syrians will away jobs from Lebanese who need them more, 63% want the monetary aid that has been given to Syrians since 2011, allocated on the Lebanese population, 72% are against giving refuge to a Syrian refugee, 51% are against allowing Syrian refugees to shelter in the previously established Palestinian refugees, 71% fear that the gradual increase in the number of Syrian refugees will lead to another inter-confessional conflict and 67% are adamant that their presence will lead to another civil war.67 Fares argues this psycho-social context is the result of a perceived condescension from the Syrians to a big portion of the Lebanese population after years of a strained relationship between the two countries. Moreover, he also claims that the study was done before the garbage crisis that happened in Lebanon and before the suicide bombing in Beirut in 2015, which aggravated the population’s fear that terrorist were hiding between Syrian refugees. He thus argues that if those factors were to be taken into consideration, the percentage of people with negative feelings towards Syrian refugees would be higher.68 These results were mirrored in the 2018 UNDP perception survey on social tensions in Lebanon with 49% of the Lebanese reporting they felt that relations with Syrians had even deteriorated more since 2014 and 64% of the respondents blaming

67 Issam, Fares. (2014). “Addressing the impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis” Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and international affairs
68 Ibid
mainly the competition on the job market for this deterioration. In some regions like Akkar, tension had increased so bad that 55% of the respondents claimed they try to have zero contact with refugees. Furthermore and as previously mentioned, the environmental sector has also been securitized in the Syrian crisis. To elaborate, Khouri explains in her article that due to the large amount of Syrian refugees in the country, Lebanon’s waste level has reached a level it was not supposed to reach before 2055, since refugees alone have produced more than forty thousand tons of waste per year since 2012, dramatically increasing the pollution in the country. Moreover, Syrian refugees have added to Lebanon’s problems on how to deal with the electricity problem seeing as they cannot provide adequate energy to their own citizens, which led to the procuration of more generators – thus also increasing the pollution. All of those environmental hazards have been securitized by the Lebanese political parties who have used the overpopulation threat in order to rationalize the hard approach they have had towards refugees. This national context has facilitated the securitization of Syrian refugees. Indeed, as aforementioned, in order for the speech act to be accepted by the audience who would then allow the securitizing actor access to unlimited power to deal with the threat, a certain context is


72 Ibid
needed or as Balzacq terms it: “Felicity Conditions”. Most scholars argue that Lebanon has securitized the Syrian refugee issue in a way to make sure that Syrians return to their county “voluntarily” and as soon as possible and in order to ensure political gain inside of Lebanon. To explain, Salloukh argues that the dealing with Palestinian refugees in the past has affected how Lebanon is dealing with Syrian refugees in the present. He also mentions the importance of noting that, although at the beginning of the crisis Lebanon had an open door policy to Syrian refugees, it shifted towards a more securitized discourse after the amount of refugees started increasing dramatically and led to a general fear of permanent settlement. Sanyal also agrees with Salloukh on the narrative that the policies being adopted by Lebanon are moving towards the migration-security nexus and mentions how, for the first time since the establishment of Lebanon and Syria, the General Security and Lebanese Ministry of Interior introduced new borders measures in the name of protecting the Lebanese State’ security. Going back to the “institutional ambiguity” that has been prominent during the Syrian crisis, scholars agree that the national securitization of Syrian refugees has had a lot of effects on the municipalities in Lebanon. Although scholars such as Boustani speak positively about the leadership role that the municipalities

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took in managing refugees and dealing with their daily affairs and command them for how much they were able to accomplish despite their lack of resources,\textsuperscript{76} others scholars like, Khatib believe that the lack of official stance on refugee issues allowed the rise of informality; Lebanese Municipalities for example have taken the issue in their own hands and are imposing arbitrary curfews on Syrian refugees in the name of security.\textsuperscript{77}

Different works offer different explanations as to the benefits of the securitization of Syrian refugees. To elaborate, scholars such as Fakhoury adopt an instrumentalization approach to the securitization of the Syrian refugee issue that has happened in Lebanon. According to her, the refugee file has been instrumentalized partly as a result of Lebanon’s “fractured elite model” and politicians’ divided interests.\textsuperscript{78} She explains that refugee assistance has been instrumentalized with political parties only giving aid to refugees who support their political views. Moreover, she argues that even political parties, who have securitized the Syrian refugees claiming to do so in order to ensure demographic balance in the county, are instrumentalizing the issue in order to boost their popularity as defenders of certain minorities in the country.\textsuperscript{79} More importantly, she reasons in another article that the “institutional vacuum” resulting from the absence of a Lebanese government resulted in an encouragement of discretionary measures, thus increasing refugee vulnerability.

\textsuperscript{76} Marwa, Boustani. (2014). “Enhancing municipal capacities: From emergency response to planning.” \textit{Beirut: Civil Society Knowledge Centre}


\textsuperscript{79} Ibid
Indeed, she proposes that despite having a “loosely articulated refugee regime”, speech acts of political elites and stances of political parties in the country have increasingly become securitized, especially after the occurrence of several security clashes between Islamist factions, wildly believed in the country to be formed by Syrian refugees and Lebanon’s army. Fakhoury continues by claiming that ever since those clashes, political elites’ speech act consists in framing the presence of Syrian refugees as a huge existential threat, and burden on Lebanon’s economy and its sectarian balance. She adds in another article that politician’s arguments revolve around the fact that refugees would cost a lot on Lebanon’s infrastructure and its social cohesion, which would result in changes in the Lebanese demography and in the general fear of refugee militarization. Building on, Nassar and Stell explain that even if informal measures and policies are not being implemented, they are being instrumentalized by municipalities in order to discipline refugees in the hope that it will eventually lead to their departure, fearing of getting abused in the name of “discipline”. According to them, the state is not the only actor when it comes to securitizing the Syrian refugees in an instrumentalized narrative. Local authorities such as makhatir and municipalities are also exploiting the issue and taking advantage of the loose and ambiguous refugee system. In fact, the absence of a clear regime, these state actors had greater leeway to manipulate the rules and introduce policies

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that rendered Syrian refugees too dependent on them. For example, seeing that municipalities are responsible for issuing the legal papers allowing refugees to stay in the country "legally", refugees have no other option than conforming to their, or else, they would be taken back to Syria.\(^{83}\) Furthermore, Al-Saadi puts forward the idea that security threats are being used as a "justification" to municipalities’ policies such as monitoring the refugees with cameras. Indeed, he believes that the presence of Syrian refugees is causing a lot of xenophobia, which leads to insecurity among the host communities. Consequently, this insecurity is being instrumentalized or used as a tool by the Lebanese municipalities.\(^ {84}\)

Scholars derive another benefit to political parties, stemming from the securitization of Syrian refugees, which is the fact that it could be used to fuel the sectarian divide giving more powers to the different parties in Lebanon. Indeed, in one of their articles the scholars Levy and Shamiyeh give an interesting narrative and claim that Hezbollah for example is securitizing Syrian refugees who are mostly Sunni to further enflame the sectarian divide in the country by portraying them as a safe haven to extremist militants. By doing so, they justify the necessity of them owning weapons and they link the survival of Lebanon to their own survival.\(^ {85}\) Adding on, Fakhoury presents the argument that

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\(^{83}\) Ibid


securitizing the Syrian refugees along politics of sectarianism has allowed the political 
elites in the country to gain on the transnational context of the Syrian war.86

Finally, there is a lot of literature concerning the legality of the securitized policies that 
the Lebanese municipalities have been implementing since the Syrian crisis. Younes gives 
her point of view and speaks about how the interactions and disputes between the host 
communities and the refugees are being informally regulated by "the young guys from the 
neighborhood" sent by municipalities without legal guidelines.87 Additionally, Atallah 
sheds the light on how municipal police are acting violently and how their code of conduct 
is ambiguous, as it has no bylaws.88 Mahdi on his part joins Atallah in claiming that in 
2016 the Lebanese municipalities bypassed their legal authority by imposing sanctions, 
but that the government allowed them to do so as under the Municipal Act, decree no. 
118/1977, where Article 74 lays down the municipalities' obligation to ensure security 
through the municipal police.89 El Mufti also argues that these policies have formed a 
ripple effect as curfews spread from twenty-five to forty-five in less than a year in

In The Face Of Syrian Displacement”. International Journal of Middle East Studies, 49(4) P 681-700. doi:10.1017/S0020743817000654

Social Challenges between the State, the Refugees and the Host Community” (paper presented at the conference “Lebanon and the Refugees and Displaced: Economic, Social 
and Security Challenges,” La Maison du Futur, Bikfaya)


89 Sami, Atallah, and Dima Mahdi. (2017). "Law and politics of “Safe Zones” and forced 
returns to Syria: Refugee politics in Lebanon." The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies 39 
P 36.
However, Al-Saadi from his part explains that, according to the law, it is only the Council of Ministers that can declare curfews and only the High Military Command who can conduct the curfews, thus rendering the curfews imposed by the municipalities illegal. He continues by stating that the municipalities have not been penalized by the government due to the fact that the foreign forces or in this case Syrians are leading to an insecurity that needs to be dealt with. All of these articles converge with Bigo’s point of view: problems are securitized not only through speech and discourse but also through the practical work and the acts of bureaucratic structures linked to security practices.

In conclusion, the literature shows us the importance of the “institutional ambiguity” and limbo that the Lebanese state has adopted as a strategy to govern Syrian refugees and how it has paved way for the securitization of the Syrian migrants by municipalities. The municipalities, often working hand in hand with the different political parties that are divided on a sectarian line, have instrumentalized the security threat that forced migrants pose on the different aforementioned sectors. The securitization process success is dependent mainly on speech act, the audience's internalization of the threats, the context and the practices.

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Chapter Three

Setting the stage - Lebanon’s politics towards the Syrian refugee issue

3.1 **Backgrounder: Lebanon’s political system with focus on municipalities**

In order to understand what enabled municipalities to gain an upper hand in the refugee file, I will shed light on how the Lebanese political system functions. Ever since the 1932 census, the political power in Lebanon has been based on a power-sharing structure to ensure that there is a fair and equal share to the country’s biggest sects.\(^{93}\) According to article 17 of the Lebanese Constitution, the speaker of Parliament must be Shi'ite, the Prime Minister must be Sunni, and the President must be a Maronite Christian. Moreover, the Tai’f Agreement that ended the Lebanese Civil War, which had lasted for fifteen years between 1975 and 1990, stipulates a principle of extensive administrative decentralization. This decentralization was included in the Lebanese constitution with the goal of enhancing local development and encouraging citizen involvement.\(^{94}\) Consequently, Lebanon is divided into eight governorates that form a higher de-concentrated tier, and twenty-five districts that form a lower de-concentrated one.


\(^{94}\) Ibid
latter is divided into 1,108 municipalities, which is a relatively high number of municipalities.\textsuperscript{95} Alarmingy, the absence of a sustainable accountability system, combined with legislative texts of conflicting nature, has hindered a lot of municipal functions that the Lebanese law grants and has limited their capacities and capabilities.\textsuperscript{96} Thus, the massive influx of refugees that has resulted from the Syrian war and which has sometimes doubled the hosting towns’ population, has given the municipalities no choice other than implementing measures to ensure the security of their cities and citizens. Indeed, the presence of all those refugees added a massive strain on the already dysfunctional local governance system, mainly as a consequence of weak implementations of the Lebanese current legal framework.\textsuperscript{97} Scholars argue that the weakness of municipalities in Lebanon is a deliberate attempt by the central government to allow the distribution of resources and power among political leaders and the sectarian group they represent in the country.\textsuperscript{98} In other words, by creating so many municipalities, the central government has made sure municipalities stay small and consequently weak and thus kept them under its control. This way, the central government has been able to use its unrestricted power to regulate the revenues of the Independent Municipal Fund, leaving municipalities in a calamitous financial situation and hindering their ability to


\textsuperscript{96} Ibid


\textsuperscript{98} Mona, Harb and Sami Atallah. (2015).” Local governments and public goods: assessing decentralization in the Arab world.” Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.
come up with a good budgetary plan to ensure their sustainable development.\textsuperscript{99} Furthermore, this dire financial situation has resulted in most Lebanese municipalities being understaffed and incapable of hiring civil servants to help them perform their administrative duties. The challenge of hiring enough civil servants is also the result of legal and bureaucratic complications. In fact, not only is the hiring procedure lengthy but the decision as to who gets hired is also completely in the hands of central government authorities, which leads to a lot of corruption and a system of clientelism.\textsuperscript{100} Moreover, the central government requires a lot of paperwork for every municipal operation, slowing down their work. This, coupled with the fact that the Lebanese municipalities are not technologically advanced and mainly rely on fax machines in order to communicate with one another, has further delayed the launching of an electronic system that would link de-concentrated and central administrations with local authorities, thus leading to an ineffective coordination between various municipalities in terms of dealing and managing their various functions.\textsuperscript{101} Therefore, most Lebanese municipalities are weak and in a financial crisis. Although the law does grant municipalities their autonomy, these bodies lack the adequate resources to achieve their roles and objectives and they must rely instead on the political elite and the central government in order to implement any local project. This creates a climate of corruption where municipalities become an extension of the political parties that form the central government.\textsuperscript{102} Interestingly enough, the Syrian

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{100} Ibid
\bibitem{101} Sami Atallah, Raneem Bassiri, and Jana Harb. (2014). “Municipal Finance must be reformed to address Lebanon’s socioeconomic crisis” \textit{Lebanese Center for Policy Studies}
\bibitem{102} Ibid
\end{thebibliography}
crisis happened during a political deadlock in Lebanon where the central government was ineffective. The burden of managing the crisis was consequently transferred to the weak municipalities that had been already facing difficulties, such as providing healthcare services, sewage treatment, housing opportunities, and security to their Lebanese citizens. The arrival of so many refugees only aggravated all these challenges and led to a highly frustrated local population.103

3.2 From “brothers” to “burden” – Shift in the Lebanese politics

Before zooming on how municipalities have been dealing with displaced persons from Syria, I will first emphasize on the reaction of the Lebanese government towards the arrival of Syrian refugees. Despite being one of the prominent members of the United Nations who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lebanon, as previously mentioned, has not signed nor ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention or its 1967 Protocol, which give refugees their rights and freedoms and legally oblige host states to protect them.104 However, based on the Lebanese Constitution, the country is devoted to providing temporary shelter and protection to any individual who is in fear of persecution. In addition, due to the fact that the country has ratified International Treaties such as the United Nations Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights105, it is dedicated to the “principle of non-refoulement”, which strictly

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105 Frontiers Center. (2013). “Lebanon-UNHCR Memorandum of Understanding,” Frontiers Center. Available at:
prohibits any nation from forcibly expulsing any person who is in danger of losing his or her life and freedom.\textsuperscript{106} Furthermore, when it comes to Syria specifically, Lebanon signed with the latter an agreement that favors having open borders between both countries. As a consequence of this agreement, the two countries enjoy free movement of goods and people between them, meaning that any Syrian or Lebanese has the right to legally work, practice economic activity and/or reside in any of the two countries while conforming and getting treated according to the host station’s national laws and regulations.\textsuperscript{107} Going back to the beginning of the Syrian crisis, all Syrian nationals were governed according to these treaties, as well as the 1992 Treaty of Brotherhood and the foreign policy of Cooperation and Coordination between Syria and Lebanon.\textsuperscript{108} Thus, the Lebanese government initially had a humanitarian approach when dealing with the first wave of refugees that had hit the country. Moreover, it opted to stay politically neutral and not support either of the sides that were in quarrel in Syria. This was highlighted by then Prime Minister Mikati when he addressed the nation stating that Lebanon will disassociate itself from the political events happening in Syria but that it will try its best to provide assistance to all the

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\textsuperscript{107} Articles 1 and 2 of the Bilateral Agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination (Syrian Lebanese Higher Council, 1991).
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incoming Syrians. This appeal to a humanitarian attitude at the beginning of the crisis was also echoed by the leader of Hezbollah, one of the country’s most important political figures, when he agreed with the Prime Minister’s statement and claimed that the Syrian crisis should be viewed as a humanitarian issue and should not be politicized. He also shed the light on the obligation of the Lebanese government to ensure the safety of all the Syrians irrespective of their sect and of whether they support the Syrian government or opposition.

Besides its early humanitarian approach, the Lebanese government did not have a response to the Syrian crisis at the beginning of the conflict and its policy was thus labeled the “policy of no-policy”. It was mainly a set of two “no's” with the first “no” being a refusal to recognize the Syrian immigrants as “refugees” and instead referring to them as “guests” so that they avoid international obligations that come with the term “refugee”, and the second “no” being a categorical refusal to establish Syrian refugee camps due to all the problems that emerged with Palestinian refugee camps in the past. Nevertheless, fears that the Syrian conflict would spill over were increasing due to the

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fact that the Lebanese political parties were disagreeing on whom to root for, as some were supporting the Syrian regime and others the Syrian opposition. To elaborate, Lebanon has been politically divided into two main blocks – 8 March and 14 March – since the assassination of then Prime Minister Rafiq El-Hariri. While the 8 March block is a prominent supporter of the Syrian regime, the 14 March block is totally against it.\textsuperscript{114} In order to ease the tension between both parties, the Baabda Declaration was adopted and it clearly stated that Lebanon would not take a side in the conflict and would avoid the repercussions that have resulted from the regional tension after the Syrian Civil War in order to safeguard its unity and peace.\textsuperscript{115} This declaration had as a core narrative the necessity of a humanitarian solidarity with Lebanon’s “neighbor” Syria.\textsuperscript{116} However, as the second and third wave of refugees started hitting Lebanon, the number of asylum seekers started becoming too big to handle. Indeed, as the war intensified in 2012, more than 50,000 additional Syrians were registering every month with the UNHCR and much more were entering the country illegally.\textsuperscript{117} This large influx was accompanied by challenges to the Lebanese state on numerous sectors such as the demographic, economic, ecological and military sectors. As a consequence, then-Minister of Interior Defense, 

\textsuperscript{114} Nazir, Ghanem. (2016). Local governance under pressure. \textit{Research on social stability in T5 area.} North Lebanon. Rome: Oxfam Italy

\textsuperscript{115} Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the UN. “Baabda Declaration Issued by the National Dialogue Committee on 11 June 2012” (UN Security Council, June 11, 2012), http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S%202012%20477.pdf.


\textsuperscript{117} UNHCR. (2015). “Refugee Response in Lebanon: Briefing Documents” Beirut: \textit{UNHCR}. 
Marwan Charbel blamed Syrians as the direct cause of Lebanon’s increased crime rate from 2011 to 2013\(^{118}\) and was also joined by then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Adnan Mansour, who insisted fanatically that Lebanon must patrol its borders and eventually close them in order to limit Syrians' entry, who, according to him, would lead Lebanon to its downfall.\(^{119}\) In 2014, a ministerial working group was formed in order to deal with the crisis and its repercussions. One of its main decisions was the October 2014 policy, which main objective was protecting Lebanon’s economy and environment by closing the borders. The policy was fully implemented and adopted in the Lebanese Crisis Refugee plan (LCRP) in 2015, which prioritized minimizing the number of refugees in the country, and increasing security measures to reduce the burden on the host society.\(^{120}\) One of the first LCRP policies was enforcing new visa regulations on any Syrian seeking asylum, treating them like all foreigners trying to enter the country.\(^{121}\) The new visas were only granted for people who have a transit in Lebanon, need medical help, wish to explore Lebanon for touristic or educational purposes, or have a working sponsorship.\(^{122}\)

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As the challenges started escalating, the Lebanese government had no choice but to call for the International community’s help. Prime Minister Mikati for example stressed on how it is vital for Lebanon to receive urgent aid in order to ease the burden that has resulted from the influx of refugees.\(^{123}\) Accordingly, a lot of International Organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union stepped forward, along with some regional powers, in order to help the Lebanese government and non-governmental organizations provide refugees with their needs for shelter, sources of revenue and services.\(^{124}\) Nevertheless, according to the UNHCR, the funds that were coming from donors and other organizations were not enough to help the Lebanese government deal with the refugees.\(^{125}\) In fact, a UNHCR report clearly stated that its funding gap kept worsening from 2015 till 2017 and the organization was only able to collect 45\% of its required funding.\(^{126}\) As the number of refugees was on the rise, their needs were also increasing while donations were on the fall. Indeed, in 2017 alone, UNHCR estimated that it needed around 2.035 billion US dollars but only got 30\% of that amount; this hindered its ability to provide clean water, adequate health care and safe food.\(^{127}\) The

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The graph below shows the gap between the funding it required and the funding it collected from 2011 to 2018.

Figure 4 - Gap between Funding requirements and collected-UNHCR, 2018

Finally, a friction also happened between UNHCR and the Lebanese government as the latter felt that the UNHCR did not have Lebanon’s best interest as a priority.\textsuperscript{128} To explain, after the government had started returning Syrian refugees to their homes, the UNHCR issued a statement that they did not approve of these actions.\textsuperscript{129} In fact, the UNHCR felt that it was vital to investigate if all members of the family returning home want to go back to Syria, and whether they still had unharmed property (to limit internal displacement)


while also stressing on the fact that they will not be able to provide protection once they go back.\textsuperscript{130} This statement was met with a wide backlash from Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil who felt that such statements were discouraging Syrians from going back to their lands.\textsuperscript{131} He consequently asked the UNHCR to stop issuing statements on refugee return, unregister all Syrians who had entered Lebanon since January 2015, and stop registering new refugees. He also blocked the attempts of UNHCR staff renewing their permits for residency.\textsuperscript{132}

In this context, the Lebanese government, faced with so many obstacles and challenges on different sectors, accused the international community of not giving the country enough support, and consequently opted to head down a new security-centered approach in order to deal with the crisis. As Prime Minister Mikati claimed, Lebanon had to change the brotherly attitude it took in order to protect its “national interest and financial reality”.\textsuperscript{133} This security-centered approach had, as a core, ambiguous, strict and changeable regulations that were not conveyed to the refugees or the humanitarian

\textsuperscript{130} UNHCR. (2015). “Refugee Response in Lebanon: Briefing Documents”. 	extit{Beirut: UNHCR}


agencies in Lebanon in a transparent manner. This was a pivotal point in the Lebanese refugee politics as it was a departure from the previously held “policy of no-policy”, and more importantly, due to the fact that it formalized the informalities that were happening before the government had an official policy. To elaborate, in the light of this departure from the “policy of no policy”, the Lebanese government paved way for Lebanese municipalities to take control of managing refugees’ everyday affairs, governing Syrian nationals by “ministerial decrees, orders, and circulars” and allowing Lebanon to sidestep a lot of international agreements. The next section of the chapter will explore specifically how municipalities governed the Syrian refugee issue.

### 3.3 Municipal Framework

In order to better understand how municipalities addressed the Syrian refugee issue, and eventually securitized it, I will first trace how municipalities have dealt with refugees from other nationalities namely Palestinians and Iraqis. This will allow me to showcase that securitizing refugees is not a novelty since historically, Palestinians and Iraqis were also dealt with similarly, as will be elaborated upon.

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135 Ibid
136 Ibid
3.3.1 Brief history of Lebanese municipalities and refugees

As previously mentioned, Lebanon has 449,957 Registered Palestinian refugees with the UNRWA, which constitutes roughly 10% of Lebanon’s total population.\(^{137}\) Since their arrival, Lebanese political leaders have been adamant that they should never get naturalized since most of them are Sunnis and would shake Lebanon’s sectarian balance. Since Palestinian refugees are not legally allowed to own real estate, most of them reside in one of twelve UN official camps in the country or in one of the forty-two unofficial Palestinian camps.\(^{138}\) Although they were welcomed in the first 10 year of the crisis with open arms (between 1948 and 1958), the Arab Nationalist Rebellion that targeted President Camil Chamoun shifted the way refugees were being perceived. Consequently, then in power General Fuad Chehab adopted a very tough stance against Palestinians and introduced strict regulations that were met by backlash and uprisings inside the camps that only ended with the 1969 Cairo accord.\(^{139}\) This accord condemned all Palestinian guerilla activities inside of Lebanon but also stipulated that the Lebanese government and all governmental institutions - including municipalities - would no longer intervene inside of the camps.\(^{140}\) Thus from 1969 until the annulment of the Cairo accord in 1987,


\(^{140}\) Ibid
Lebanese municipalities did not deal with Palestinian refugees at all. All the municipal functions such as providing electricity, water and even ensuring security and safety for households inside of the camps were instead being fulfilled by semi-official Palestinian popular committees that started acting as municipalities. Refugees living in the forty-two unofficial gatherings were not considered under the Lebanese municipalities’ jurisdiction as well, since Palestinians did not pay taxes.\textsuperscript{141} In 1987, the expulsion of the Palestinian Liberation Organization that was previously in charge inside of the camps resulted in a power vacuum. Although, some but very few municipalities adjacent to camps tried meddling with the internal affairs of refugees, most of them opted not to take part seeing that all camps are heavily divided politically and fights among different parties took place more often than not.\textsuperscript{142} The Lebanese government opted instead to deal with Palestinians as a security threat and restricted their movement to only inside the refugee camps, without granting them the right to work.\textsuperscript{143} To this day, Lebanese political elites have on numerous occasions refused to legitimize any Palestinian Popular Committee’s leader claiming the latter compose a security threat.\textsuperscript{144} In fact, any Palestinian political


\textsuperscript{142} Ibid


movement is considered an existential threat that will endanger the Lebanese state. Consequently, the Lebanese municipalities act as caretakers of the new Palestinian Popular Committees. To explain, Popular Committees are dependent on the Lebanese municipalities as they need the latter’s permission in order to be able to fix a house inside the camp or even work with a non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Likewise, municipalities count on Popular Committees to act as a buffer and to soften any problem that might arise with Palestinian refugees. Since there is no policy guideline for municipalities on how to deal with Palestinian communities inside or outside the camps, each municipality adopted a different strategy based on the personal feelings or affiliations of its head of municipality. This was obviously demonstrated in the recent garbage crisis that hit Lebanon. Indeed, the situation in the Palestinian camps was terrible and only exacerbating as Lebanese authorities had decided to stop waste management in these areas. According to the head of the Union of Popular Committees, some municipalities helped and assisted the camps, just like the municipality of Saida did in the Eein Helwi camp, while other municipalities did not lend a hand at all. Therefore, some municipalities acted as gatekeepers for Palestinians while other did not deal with them at

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all. With that said, it is safe to conclude that, when it comes to the interaction between municipalities and Palestinian refugees, the relationship depends on the level of cooperation between municipalities and the Palestinian Popular Committees and on the personal views of the heads of municipalities.

As for the Iraqi refugees-Lebanese municipalities’ relationship, it is unmistakable that the latter have treated the Iraqis as entities outside of their responsibility ever since they entered Lebanon in 2003. The Lebanese government never legalized Iraqi refugees and justified it by claiming that if they were to stay in Lebanon they would threaten Lebanon’s security. The government then gave all refugees that are not registered with the International Labor Organization (ILO) an ultimatum: either be detained in Lebanese jails indefinitely or return to Iraq voluntarily. Subsequently, municipalities have been neglecting all Iraqi refugees, often reporting them to authorities and taking them to the detention camps. Furthermore, since the illegal status of these refugees dismisses any potential relationship or connection between them and the municipalities, the Iraqis hence have to resort to NGOs in order to get access to their basic needs and services. Unfortunately, many of the Iraqis feel that the help they were getting from the NGOs and International Organizations has been re-allocated towards Syrian refugees after the Syrian

150 Ibid
151 Ibid
crisis. This coupled, with the fact that Syrians are taking most low labor jobs, has rendered Iraqi’s daily lives even harder.\textsuperscript{152}

To conclude, Lebanese municipalities, mirroring the Lebanese government, have justified their actions towards Palestinians and Iraqi refugees in the name of protecting the Lebanese state’s security. The following section will highlight how municipalities similarly treated Syrian refugees as a security threat.

3.3.2\textbf{Municipalities as governors of the Syrian refugee issue}

In light of the LCRP, which prioritized reducing the number of refugees, municipalities were put in charge to verify that Syrians had completed all the tasks and requirements before having their residency renewed. To guarantee that the refugees would not be able to finish all these tasks, municipalities made sure they were expensive, complicated and time consuming.\textsuperscript{153} For example, refugees wishing to stay had to provide proof of a housing commitment. This document is a certified residency statement that only municipalities can provide.\textsuperscript{154} Therefore, in the midst of the new formal Lebanese policies, informality and “institutional ambiguity” ruled, and municipalities took power. This deliberate political response not to develop a better system, paved the way for municipalities to totally control refugees, and enabled them to be the main actors in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} Fillipo, Dionigi. (2016). “The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. State fragility and social resilience.” London: London School of Economics \textit{Middle East Centre Paper} No. 15 P. 16
\end{itemize}
supervising, administrating and managing them. Additionally, municipalities were constantly amending, without notice, the government’s new laws on how to deal with Syrian refugees.\textsuperscript{155} In fact, the new laws were written in such an aspirational language, rendering them very flexible and open to interpretation. This has led to a bureaucratic maze, which only delayed Syrian refugees’ attempts to obtain all the required documents for their legal stay. Indeed, an example of the municipal bureaucratic maze can be seen throughout municipal offices where each officer demands different documents for the same paper, making it very confusing to actually obtain the paper.\textsuperscript{156} Thus, through ever-changing, obstructive and tiresome procedures, the informality and the gap in Lebanese policies allowed municipalities and municipal officers to apply “discretionary governance”.\textsuperscript{157} Municipalities also made the task of obtaining a Lebanese sponsor practically impossible for refugees not registered with UNHCR. Indeed, all Lebanese individuals who even tried to sponsor a refugee and provide him or her with a “pledge of responsibility” were highly discouraged by municipalities that made their attempts very burdensome.\textsuperscript{158} Furthermore, a lot of Syrians whose papers were being rejected by municipalities upon submission reported that they were told the deadline had passed. However, according to Amnesty International, no clear deadline for papers submission


\textsuperscript{157}Ibid

was ever set, despite numerous requests. This paradox resulted in a huge number of Syrian refugees without legal and valid papers. Hence, a lot of them started breaking the law and blaming municipalities for blocking their attempts at legalizing their stay, making it an impossible task and thus giving them no other choice but to fight for their survival. Asylum seekers were also heavily dependent on NGOs and on International Organizations as the latter were providing them with their basic needs. However, these institutions were dependent themselves on municipalities and could not function without them. In fact, municipalities acted as mediators between refugees and all humanitarian and international organizations that were trying to assist refugees, which enabled them to take a leading role in distributing aids. Municipalities then, applied a selective approach as to who gets the help and who does not, which de facto made refugees totally dependent on them. Indeed, since most of the municipalities in Lebanon are either affiliated with or backed by certain political parties, aid was only distributed to refugees belonging to the same sect as the respective party. Nevertheless, not all municipalities were receiving enough help and assistance, pushing several municipal leaders to speak up to the press and complain

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about how they were alone in handling the crisis and how their resources were limited.\textsuperscript{163} To add, municipalities also took it upon themselves to ensure “law and order”, especially after the issuance of two national circulars that basically decentralized security management and allowed municipalities to work as they see fit, in order to ensure the safety of their citizens and disallow the formation of informal settlements.\textsuperscript{164} These circulars were pivotal as they allowed municipal leaders to interpret them very broadly. Accordingly, some municipalities opted to put salary ceilings – \$16 for male refugees and \$8 for female refugees – in order to make sure their citizens are secure on the economic level.\textsuperscript{165} They justified this salary cap by claiming that they “felt” they needed to respond to the increasing unemployment rate, as it was their duty to protect the citizens.\textsuperscript{166} This was one out of many measures taken by municipalities in order to deal with the perceived threat that refugees posed, and municipalities were only able to do so by adopting a tactic of securitizing the Syrian refugee.\textsuperscript{167} The process of securitization will be thoroughly analyzed in the next chapter of the thesis.


\textsuperscript{166} Ibid

Chapter Four

The securitization process under the municipal framework

In order to highlight how the securitization of Syrian refugees happened, I will use in this chapter the indicators of securitization that were previously discussed in the methodology section on eight different case studies representing the different Lebanese governorates. The research will focus on the following; first, that the number of refugees has grown to an alarming number and second and more importantly, that municipalities were able to securitize the issue in order to legitimize their policies. In order to do so, the municipalities of Zahle, Halba, Baalbek, Dekwene, Bourj Hammoud, Kfar-Rimman, Mezyara and Baysarieh will be zoomed on. The first section of this chapter revolves around the drivers that led to a heightened perceived security threat.

4.1 Drivers of the securitization process

4.1.1 Perceived Economic Threat

The Arab Spring and the uprisings in the MENA region had increased the risk of investing in the region, bringing about a drastic fall in foreign investment and complicating any trade agreement. This had resulted in an economic crisis in Lebanon. Moreover, tourism, one of the once most vital sectors of the country's economy, had also been on a decline as
a result of the instability of the region, leading to one of the largest fiscal deficits in Lebanon’s history.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, unemployment, economic losses and poverty had been prominent aspects of Lebanon’s economy, even before the arrival of Syrian refugees. Alarmingly, Lebanon currently has the third highest worldwide public debt according to the World Bank, which amounts to 156.1\% of its GDP and is only projected to grow to more than 180\% of its GDP in 2023.\textsuperscript{169} The arrival of more than a million Syrian refugees only added to the woes of the country. Indeed, according to the Lebanese Response Plan in 2015-2016, the crisis resulted in 61\% increase in poverty, added 50\% more labor force and cost US$7.5 billion in economic losses to the country.\textsuperscript{170} Moreover, refugees who feared that they might be staying in the country for a long time, started looking for jobs at very low rates, which led to more competition on an already saturated job market. Indeed, 34\% of the Lebanese were unemployed and the number could only increase due to the new competition with Syrian refugees.\textsuperscript{171} Additionally, the arrival of the large influx of refugees widened the gap between the rich and the poor and this inequality added more stress and anxiety to the Lebanese population who started perceiving refugees as a

\textsuperscript{168} International Labour Organization. (2014). “Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile” Beirut: \textit{ILO Regional Office for Arab State}


Moreover, due to the fact that most refugees are residing in the same poor areas, housing market prices also went up dramatically. With more than 50% of refugees renting houses, landlords increased their prices to make more profit. Finally, keeping in mind that Lebanon can barely meet the needs of its own population when it comes to basic needs such as health services and enough electricity to every Lebanese household, the government and municipalities’ attempts to also support and cater for so many refugees were received with wide backlashes from the Lebanese population who believed that it is their own needs and demands that should be prioritized. This was highlighted in a statement said by Prime Minister Mikati who claimed that even Lebanese hospitals could no longer admit Lebanese patients since most of their beds were and still are occupied by Syrians. The perception of the economic threat was also evident on the municipal level. This was manifested for example, when on April 9 2017, the municipality of Zahle organized in the municipal building a protest demanding to regulate the Syrian refugees’ presence in their hometown because of the competition they were facing then on the small-business level especially at a time where the citizens were struggling financially.

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As another example, according to a municipal official, the Baysarieh municipality was “scared” that Syrians were being employed instead of Lebanese due their cheap wages.\textsuperscript{176}

To conclude, it is clear that the influx of Syrian refugees started becoming a massive strain and burden on the Lebanese economy, government and municipalities that no longer had enough resources or capacities to deal with the situation, a burden that heightened the local population’s fears.

### 4.1.2 Perceived Ecological Threat

Another sector that has been influenced by Syrian refugees is the Lebanese environmental sector. Delving into the problems of overpopulation, Lebanon’s territory - that spreads over 10,452 km\(^2\) - hosts today more than six million people. Keeping in mind that 79\% of the Lebanese lands are habitable while 21\% are mountainous and inhabitable, there is an average of 550 people per km\(^2\).\textsuperscript{177} Adding on, the fact that the refugees are mainly Sunni and are living in Sunni areas in Lebanon, has led to an overpopulation in those areas which is adding pressure on the municipalities’ capacities and resources to deal with the crisis.\textsuperscript{178}

This dense overpopulation, combined with bad Lebanese waste management programs, has led to water sanitation problems, waste generation and to the increase of pollution caused by the rise in the number of vehicles being used.\textsuperscript{179} In fact, the waste levels in

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\textsuperscript{176} “Lebanon environmental assessment of the Syrian conflict and priority interventions” (2014)


\textsuperscript{178} Lebanon environmental assessment of the Syrian conflict and priority interventions (2014) P. 40
Lebanon have been increasing so exponentially that they reached in 2015 the level that had been previously projected for 2055.\(^{180}\) This is the result of the fact that since 2012, refugees have been producing every year more than 40,000 tons of waste. In order to try and eliminate some of that waste, the Lebanese government opted to either dispose it in open dumps, which would result in an increased contamination, or to burn it, which would also lead to an increase in the country’s pollution levels.\(^{181}\) More alarmingly, these high levels of pollution increase the risks of catching diseases due to the fact that most refugees live in open spaces.\(^{182}\) Another factor that has contributed to an increase in pollution levels is the increase in the use of electrical generators in order to provide enough electricity to all refugee households. This resulted in a 10% increase in nitrogen dioxide emission.\(^{183}\) Overpopulation has also led to an increase in water demand, causing the depletion of most water resources in the country and the decrease in the quality of potable water. Unfortunately, not having enough drinking water has led to a higher percentage of people falling sick and the depletion of water resources has put Lebanon’s animals and plants at danger of extinction.\(^{184}\) Finally, the threats to the environmental sector deeply intensified in the summer of 2015 with the start of the Lebanese garbage crisis. Indeed, after a friction between the government and private companies that are in charge of managing the Lebanese garbage, the latter were fired, which led to tons of waste and garbage on the street. Unfortunately, a lot of this garbage was dumped in areas next to where refugees

\(^{180}\) Ibid
\(^{181}\) Lebanon environmental assessment of the Syrian conflict and priority interventions. (2014). P.101
\(^{182}\) Ibid P. 87
\(^{183}\) Ibid P. 88
\(^{184}\) Ibid P. 78
live, pushing neighboring cities to complain at the municipal level about the smell that was erupting from the refugee areas and consequently creating tensions between the Syrian refugees and the Lebanese communities that were directly blaming refugees for all these ecological problems.\textsuperscript{185} One of the scariest direct consequences that would result from this garbage is a large-scale outbreak of diseases that could hit the whole country. To add, the fact that most refugees are not being monitored and supervised means that if such an outbreak happens, it would be practically impossible the stop the spread of diseases that would happen in the whole region.\textsuperscript{186} Thus, the overpopulation that resulted from the influx of large quantities of Syrian refugees, is putting the lives of both the asylum seekers and the host Lebanese community are at high risk, a risk that is making Lebanese municipalities feel in danger. This was highlighted for example, when both the head of the municipality in Batroun, Marcelino al-Harak and the Environment Minister, Tarek Khatib condemned the Syrian refugees and blamed them for polluting the Lebanese rivers in a joined statement.\textsuperscript{187} They argued that it was “crystal clear” that Syrians were dumping their waste and garbage in the river instead of in the recycling bins that the municipalities had distributed throughout cities in order to mitigate the garbage crisis.\textsuperscript{188} As another example, in the town of Halba municipal officials asked for the help of NGOs.


\textsuperscript{186} Ibid


\textsuperscript{188} Ibid
and UNHCR on more than one occasion, pleading that the pollution that was resulting from the refugees was unbearable.\textsuperscript{189}

4.1.3 Perceived Societal Threat

Refugees are being perceived as a threat to the societal sector as well. The challenges that Syrian refugees pose on this sector will be divided into three groups: historical tension, demographic and ethnic imbalance, and finally cultural dissimilarities. To begin with, one of the main reasons behind the rising tension between the host community and the Syrian refugees is their complicated intertwined history that has been hostile more often than not. Indeed, as previously mentioned, a major political block in the country blames Syria for several assassinations that happened to key political figures in the country.\textsuperscript{190} Delving more into history, the animosity between both states goes back to when the Syrian military was designated to become a peacemaking force to end the civil war that had hit Lebanon for twenty-five years. The Syrian army was projected to leave the country as soon as the war ended. However, they stayed until 2005, despite the disapproval of Lebanese people.\textsuperscript{191} During their stay, the Syrian military took a lot of Lebanese as prisoners and their fate remains unknown. Moreover, Syria was accused by many Lebanese political actors of limiting Lebanon’s sovereignty by controlling its economy and politics and by using its military power to interfere whenever it suits them. The Syrian presence is thus a

\textsuperscript{189} Interview with Halba head of municipality Mr. Abdel Hamid Al-Halabi
\textsuperscript{190} Youssef, Bassil. (2012). "Syrian hegemony over Lebanon after the Lebanese civil war." \textit{Journal of Science} 136.2 P 136-147.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid
bad memory to a lot of Lebanese. ¹⁹² To continue, another aspect that also plays a role in this discomfort is a general fear of demographic change or ethnic imbalance, which is also drawn from past experiences with other refugees, mainly the Palestinian ones. As previously mentioned in the literature review, the fear of Tawteen in a country divided upon sectarian lines had resulted in an anti-refugee mentality.¹⁹³ Delving more into the topic, this mentality is highlighted in a plea letter written by the Christian Maronite Lebanese church addressing then French President Francois Hollande, explaining to him that Syrian refugees must go back to Syria or the thin demographic balance that was created after the war will be at a huge risk.¹⁹⁴ Finally, Syrian refugees and the host community have a lot of cultural dissimilarities. To explain, despite the fact that both states have the same language and are Arab states, their cultural background and social practices are not the same. The social practices differences were obvious when for example, Lebanese started complaining to municipalities that the refugees were abusing their public gardens and that they were going to the beaches fully clothed, which to the Lebanese was not acceptable.¹⁹⁵ As most refugees come from underprivileged areas in Syria, they are perceived as poor, uneducated and highly likely to commit a crime. These perceptions have led the Syrians to feel like the Lebanese are racist, xenophobic,

¹⁹² Ibid
disrespectful and of exploitative nature. This has caused a lot of verbal and physical clashes between both communities and has become a great deal of concern to municipalities. To conclude, the influx of Syrians refugees created tension with the Lebanese community mainly due to their ethnic and cultural differences. The fright of a demographic imbalance and a bad history between both States also led to the rise of societal tensions that could erupt into more violent crashes and security threats. This was manifested the most in the municipalities in the Bekaa and Akkar area. Indeed, according to a report done by the Lebanese NGO Save the Children and the American University of Beirut which had as one of its objectives, assessing the existential threat (threat to life) perception between residents and refugees, all sampled municipalities in that area registered the highest perceived societal threat level when asked about Syrian refugees. In the town of Mezayara as well, the municipality had demanded that all refugees be evicted, claiming that residents were now living in fear because of the refugees.

4.1.4 Perceived dangers of Refugee camps

The influx of Syrian refugees created an amplified fear of refugee zones getting weaponized or militarized and those zones were perceived by the Lebanese population as

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196 Ibid
199 Interview with Mezyara head of municipality Mr. Maroun Dina
one of the biggest threats Syrian refugees posed. To begin with, it is safe to say that the Palestinian refugee experience and all the problems that emerged from the Palestinian refugee camps have traumatized the Lebanese Government. To elaborate, back when Palestinians were fleeing to Lebanon, the government at the time decided to build for them settlement camps, with the hope that these camps will be a temporary refuge for the Palestinians as opposed to them becoming fully fledged members of the Lebanese society. However, paramilitary groups took control of these camps, which was a direct contradiction of the 1987 agreement that had removed the Palestinian autonomy in these specified areas. The camps also allowed the Palestinian community to gain political power where extreme radicalization started increasing. The challenges Palestinian camps posed to the Lebanese government hindered and delayed the state’s development due to the fact that they only added to its deep political division. In the context of the Syrian crisis, the distress of similar challenges explains the Lebanese skepticism towards the new refugee camps. Moreover, many regard these camps as safe havens for terrorists; most Lebanese believe that the camps will only become shelters to criminals and outlaws who have not been directly affected by the Syrian war and who will transform the areas into centers for


202 Ibid
armament. Even Lebanese politicians such as Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah mentioned that violent extremists and militants would use the camps as perfect sanctuaries for their training, which was perceived by the Lebanese population as a massive security threat on Lebanon’s stability. To back up his argument, he gave as an example the 2007 war that had happened in Nahr Al-Bared, between an official Palestinian camp sheltering adherents to the Islamist militant organization called Fath Al-Islam and the Lebanese army. Finally, Lebanese are also afraid that if they were to build UN formal camps for Syrians, the refugees would start relying crippingly on the assistance that these infrastructures provide, and would thus stop trying to find solutions to go back to Syria, making their stay in Lebanon longer. To conclude, the negative experiences with previous refugee camps have led to an anxiety among the Lebanese population. As the quantity of Syrian refugees started increasing and was associated with a feeling that the stability of the country’s security was at high risk, this anxiety was mirrored at the municipal level. This was unmistakable for example in cities like Dekwaneh where the head of the municipalities reasoned that one of the most traumatic experiences the town had ever went through was dealing with Palestinian refugee camps which they shared borders with and that if Syrians were to reside in formal camps, it would only lead to a civil war. Similar fears were echoed by a municipal official in Zahle who claimed that


206 Interview with Dekwaneh head of municipality Mr. Antoine Shakhtoura
the Zahle municipality was adamant that the solution of forming Syrian refugee camps would never be considered as it would only pave way to either a civil war or a terrorist hive hiding in those camps.²⁰⁷

Now that we’ve discussed the different perceived threats that were drivers that allowed municipalities to securitize the migration dilemma, the following will shed light on the way municipal officials were able to do it.

4.2 **Speech Act and stakeholders’ statements’ analysis**

As was explained in chapter 1, the Copenhagen School stresses the importance of speech act in the securitizing process this is why in this part of the thesis, an exploration of speeches made by key officials from both the government and the municipalities taken as case studies takes place. However, before analyzing the different speech acts and statements, it is important to mention that the use of specific words can help portray minority groups, such as refugees, in discriminatory ways and help shape majority groups’ opinions on them in both a positive or negative way.²⁰⁸ To elaborate, in order to widen the dichotomization between “Us” and “Them”, refugees are usually referred to by words such as "danger", "law abusers", and "burden" in order to associate them with security

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²⁰⁷ Interview with Zahle municipality council member Mr. Samir Mallo
threats in the minds of hosting communities. The specific wording in the way Syrian refugees are depicted in stakeholders’ statements will thus be analyzed.

On a national level, several political figures have linked Syrians with security threats. Then-President Michel Sleiman for example, in a speech addressed to the nation at the end of his presidency claimed that it is Lebanon’s duty to take “brave urgent internal decisions” in order to be able to face the “aggravating problem of Syrian refugees which are a major existential challenge”. His speech draws an image of a threat that can only be solved through the use of out the norm measures. In fact, he was also joined by Prime Minister Mikati who had announced before leaving office that the “repercussions of Syrian nationals on Lebanon have been immense” and that with such a large number of refugees living in poverty "crimes will increase and eventually extremism will be born". By using words such as “immense repercussions” and implying to a future scenario where violent extremists live in Lebanon, he focuses on the security dangers of the state. Furthermore, Lebanon’s security is heavily discussed in the discourse of politicians belonging to both sides of the political divide in the country. Indeed, then-Minister of Social Affairs Rashid Derbas – a partisan of the 14 march alliance, which as previously mentioned is the political coalition block that is against the Syrian regime in Lebanon -

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has used when addressing the media the expression “the government is unbearably overloaded because of the unstoppable influx of refugees” numerous times when referring to the Syrian refugee issue and has stressed on the fact that there is no greater threat to Lebanon’s society than the Syrian presence. The use of such statements is to convince the Lebanese society that the refugees are not only a burden anymore but they’ve escalated past the point of no return to become an existential threat that necessitates a heavy security approach. Finally, the securitization discourse is also evident in politicians belonging to the political coalition that is pro-Syrian regime, the 8th March block. Indeed, Minister of Foreign Affairs Gebran Bassil stated in his speech during the Arab Summit that refugees are an “urgent security threat” as terrorists are hiding among them. He also echoes the beliefs that "a more aggressive approach and higher security measures" should be used to deal with the large quantity of refugees that “threaten the existence of Lebanon as a whole because of the plots to establish military blocs”. Finally, then Ministry of Interior, Mr. Marwan Charbel also joined in the securitized rhetoric when he released a statement advising all municipalities to increase their security measures against

the existential threat Syrians pose by expanding their local police and buying weapons to defend themselves when necessary.\textsuperscript{216}

When it comes to the municipal level, a similar discourse focused on securitization was adopted in the selected eight case studies.

To begin with, in the town of Zahle, Antoine Abou Younes, the municipality vice president, has on numerous occasions spoken to the media about how Syrians should not be called refugees but migrants who should go back to Syria because Lebanon does not need another threat similar to the Palestinian camps.\textsuperscript{217} In another speech, he also blamed Syrian refugees for 80\% of all the security problems that are happening in Zahle and urged all its Lebanese population to “take extra caution in face of such dangerous law abusers”.\textsuperscript{218} Adding on, according to the municipal council member Mr. Samir Mallo, the municipality repeatedly released statements to the citizens of Zahle warning them that Syrians are a “grave danger that needs to be dealt with immediately” because of the garbage they produce and throw in the lakes, and the pollution they generate.\textsuperscript{219} As for in the Mezyara municipality, the head of the municipality Mr. Maroun Dina was interviewed and claimed that the municipality took the decision to call the large influx of Syrian refugees a “Tsunami” when speaking about the issue with the citizens to stress on how

\textsuperscript{219} Interview with Zahle municipality council member Mr. Samir Mallo
dangerous they are. Furthermore, after a Syrian national raped and murdered a twenty-six year old Lebanese girl, a municipal spokesperson issued a statement on how Syrians were now no longer considered "refugees" but "invaders" who are "occupying" and have to be dealt with through any necessary means. To continue, in Baysarieh, Nazih Ali Abed who is the head of the municipality has addressed the media several times claiming that in his town where 4,500 Lebanese residents reside, there are now more than 8,000 Syrian refugees (almost double the number of Lebanese citizens) who are a “menace” and a threat due to the exacerbating tensions between both parties, with clashes and fights repeatedly happening on the streets. He also stated later when interviewed that the size of refugees had gone way past a “boiling point” and that the municipality had no other choice but to take necessary security actions for the sake of the town. The same discourse can be seen in statements made by Muhammad Najdi, a municipal council member in the city of Kfar-Rimman who is in charge of refugee affairs, when he released a statement by the municipality claiming that they were facing “their greatest threat ever” - the overcrowding that had affected the city and the security risks that come with that overcrowding. He explains that in the town that has 9,000 residents, there are now at least 8,000 Syrian refugees living in Kfar Rimman, which is a “grave security danger” on both the ability of the city’s infrastructure to accommodate to such a large number of people, and on the town’s security due to the fact that a big bulk of the refugee population is

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220 Interview with Mezyara head of municipality Mr. Maroun Dina
223 Interview with Baysarieh head of municipality Mr. Nazih Ali Abed
unknown to local authorities. The head of the municipality Mr. Yaser Ali-Ahmad also explained that the municipality felt like it was responsible for “ensuring the safety of all Lebanese who were at great risk of losing the town to Syrians” due to the fact that the “demographic imbalance was dangerously affected”. As for Bourj Hammoud, the Vice president of the municipality has released a declaration asserting that the municipality would start implementing security measures against Syrian refugees after the “extremely violent” clashes between refugees and residents of the city. Adding on, in an interview with another municipal official, he affirmed that all the Lebanese residing in the area had been “alarmed and notified” that Syrian nationals were committing crimes due to their harsh living conditions and the municipality was increasing police personnel to deal with the issue. Likewise, in the city of Dekwaneh, Antoine Shakhtoura, head of the municipality has addressed the media to assert that it is the municipality’s duty to “ensure first, the safety of its citizens, and second, work opportunities to its Lebanese residence” and Syrian refugees have “made accomplishing those tasks extremely harder”. He also stressed on the importance of noting that in the past, a lot of tension has resulted from fights between Dekwaneh residents and Palestinian refugees in Tel el Zaatar, a settlement camp next to Dekwaneh, and this has led to everyone at the municipality and in the city fearing that tensions would return with the “alarmingly growing rate of Syrian

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225 Interview with Kfar-Rimman head of municipality Mr. Yaser Ali-Ahmad
227 Read More at: https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/peaceful-settlement-syrian-refugees-eastern-suburbs-beirut-understanding-causes-social

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immigrants”. Similarly, in the town of Baalbek, the governor Bashir Khodor used securitized words when explaining why the municipality had increased its security measures. Indeed, throughout his speeches to the media and to the town residents, he kept insisting that the situation is very “fragile” and the crisis is now of “unprecedented magnitude that will hinder the municipality’s development”. The head of the municipality Mr. Hussein El-Lakiss also argued when interviewed that the town residents were cautioned and advised that “extremely dangerous terrorists” were hiding among refugees and that they must always “stay alert”. Finally, in Halba, head of the municipality Abdel Hamid Al-Halabi has, in most of his addresses to the media, zoomed on the fact that the municipality is at a “breaking point” as its economy has “never been worse” and that new measures were “indispensable” for the town’s “survival”. He also clarified when interviewed that with more than 17,000 refugees, the garbage and waste levels were increasing to such a “life threatening number, that diseases were bound to happen”.

To conclude this section, Lebanese government officials - regardless of whether they belong to the 8 or 14 March block - as well as municipal officials from the municipalities representing different governorates in Lebanon, have been using securitizing words to frame the Syrian crisis as an existential crisis that can only be avoided if out of the

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228 Interview with Dekwaneh head of municipality Mr. Antoine Shakhtoura
230 Interview with Baalbek head of municipality Mr. Hussein El-Lakiss
232 Interview with Halba head of municipality Mr. Abdel Hamid Al-Halabi
ordinary measures are taken, or else the crisis will lead Lebanon and the Lebanese citizens to their doom. This fits with the first stage of the securitization process that was explained in the theoretical chapter of the thesis in section 1.2. However, as was also explained in that chapter, the securitization can go beyond speech act and can actually happen through securitized policies. The next section will therefore explore the securitization policies that happened.

4.3 **Securitization policies and extraordinary measures**

In order to unpack how the securitization took place institutionally and beyond the speech act, the following indicators will be analyzed: whether the municipality issued important Immigration Acts or policies linking between migration and security and whether the municipality developed a specialized department that is in charge of national security where immigration is a key element.

The Lebanese government has adopted securitized policies and acts that tie migration governance with security measures. Indeed, one of the most important policies that governed the forced migration of Syrian nationals was the October 2014 Policy paper. The different clauses in the October 2014 Policy aimed at reducing or at least stopping the big influx of refugees at the borders, hence a tighter border control started being implemented and new restrictive visas were introduced in the name of Lebanon’s national interest. Furthermore it stipulated that displaced Syrians should be regulated more strictly,
and forced municipalities to regularly keep count of all the foreigners in their towns.\textsuperscript{233} The municipalities took the matter into their own hands and this is evident through municipal decisions such as the Circular No. 2072 in 2016 issued by the governor of Mount Lebanon to all municipalities and which revolved around “procedures to maintain public safety”.\textsuperscript{234} This circular warned municipalities that they must be extra careful if they were to host summer festivals in their towns as “foreigners are a menace” and insisted that extra security measures such as searching equipment at the entrance and exit of all locations should be taken.\textsuperscript{235} Moreover, the circular also instructed municipalities to issue paperwork for all Syrian refugees and to keep updating those papers repeatedly.\textsuperscript{236} Another municipality decree example is Decision No. 148, which only allows Syrian refugees to find a sponsor in a fifteen-day timeframe, a task that is practically impossible.\textsuperscript{237} Adding on, another immigration policy that links security measures to migration is Decree No. 17561, which regulates the work of Syrian refugees and only allows them to work in three fields: construction, environment and agriculture. This was restated in Decision No. 1/179 in 2016 and again in 20118 with the Decision No. 1/29. The rationale behind both decisions was to protect and secure the Lebanese economy from


\textsuperscript{234} Ibid


\textsuperscript{236} Ibid

\textsuperscript{237} “Municipal Regulation of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: The Case of Kfar-Rimman.” Legal Agenda, legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=3204
the Syrian refugees. Municipalities issued decrees as well restricting the amount of foreigners allowed to live in the same household to only parents and children (no relatives allowed) to protect the towns’ infrastructure. Finally, the General Security also issued Act 421/2017 in 2018 which amended and hardened the conditions whereby Syrian refugees can enter and reside in Lebanon legally due to the increased threat of immigrants in the country.

As for the other indicator of securitization, several municipalities formed specialized departments to manage refugee affairs with an objective of protecting national interest. Indeed, the municipality of Dekwaneh department for example, consisted of the head of the municipality, the head of the municipal police, municipal police officers, General Security officers as well as informants from inside the town. The department’s goal was to proactively and preemptively defer any threat resulting from Syrian refugees or any other foreigner and thus was consistently monitoring their presence inside of the town. The informants were used to “keep an eye” on the street in case of any suspicious behavior.

Similar departments were formed in other municipalities where the hierarchy and structure changed as a direct consequence of the influx of Syrian immigrants. To explain, in the municipality of Kfar-Rimman for example, Muhammad Najdi became in charge of managing refugee affairs, a position that was non-existent before the Syrian

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239 Interview with Zahle municipality council member Mr. Camil Ammoury
241 Interview with Dekwaneh head of municipality Mr. Antoine Shakhtoura
242 Ibid
crisis. A special hotline also became available for Lebanese citizens to contact at any point they feel that their security is breached. 243

Therefore, Lebanese municipalities securitized Syrian refugees through policies and through speech act, conforming to the theories of both the Copenhagen School and the Paris School that were discussed in Chapter 1.

Now that I have discussed how officials drew on security speech acts and adopted policies to frame displaced Syrians as a threat (both discursively and institutionally), I will explore how municipal officials have suspended “normal politics” and have taken extraordinary measures to deal with the threat. Hence, the following section will shed light on the security measures that the selected Lebanese municipalities adopted to securitize the Syrian refugee issue.

The municipality of Zahle for example, adopted curfews on all Syrian nationals after 6 PM and has evicted the biggest number Syrian refugees according to UNHCR. 244 Furthermore, the municipality started issuing “special papers for Syrians only” and started charging them for the renewal of those papers, which are like an identification card. Any Syrian found without those papers became at risk of being caught or evicted. 245 The municipal police was sent as well at numerous occasions to escort any refugee refusing to sign on eviction papers, which led to altercations between both sides and ended with a lot

243 Interview with Kfar-Rimman head of municipality Mr. Yaser Ali-Ahmad
245 Interview with Zahle municipality council member Mr. Camil Ammoury
of refugees handcuffed or sent to detention and prison. Finally, the municipal police was also tasked to raid refugees’ households to check that they were not violating the municipal decision that only allowed one Syrian family to live per household and evicted those found culpable. In Mezyara also, the municipality issued an order to evict all Syrian refugees and sent the municipal police to make sure everyone followed the order after having earlier imposed curfews on them. The municipality also closed down all shops run by Syrian nationals. Furthermore, those who were working in construction sites had to pass by municipal checkpoints at the entrance and exit of the town where they had to present a working permit that only the municipality can issue. Finally, any Syrian national found sleeping in a house in Mezyara was handcuffed and sent to prison, and the landowner of the house was subject to heavy fines. To continue, in Baysarieh the municipality also closed down shops ran by Syrian refugees. Curfews banning refugees from walking at night on the streets were imposed as well, and residents were urged to contact the municipal police at any time should they see a Syrian breaking the curfew. Finally, the municipality increased the number of its police officers and started raiding households in the middle of the night and held Syrian nationals under arrest if they did not have legal papers. Likewise, in Kfar-Rimman, the municipality on August 11 2016 asked the municipal police to ban Syrians from parking their cars in public spaces and to confiscate and impound any car with a Syrian number. Additionally it banned Syrian

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248 Interview with Mezyara head of municipality Mr. Maroun Dina
249 Interview with Baysarieh head of municipality Mr. Nazih Ali Abed
marriages and any households suspected of holding a gathering of the like was therefore invaded by the police. The municipality also started punishing any Syrian caught littering by detaining them and interrogating them which in some cases led to evicting them.  

To add, the municipality took a step further and decided to only accept Syrians who are sponsored by a Lebanese resident from the town itself. This contradicted the 2015 LCRP which stipulates that sponsors can be from any town. Similarly, the Bourj Hammoud municipality has also imposed curfews on Syrian refugees. Additionally, after security problems that had happened between refugees and residents of the city, the municipality ordered the municipal police to search all the areas where Syrians reside and to arrest any suspicious looking person. They also placed municipal police officers at the entrance of the municipal park and banned Syrians from entering it. As for in Dekwaneh, the municipality has also taken several policies to limit the Syrians movement in it. Adding to the curfews that were imposed on Syrians, extra measures such as banning them from

250 Interview with Kfar-Rimman head of municipality Mr. Yaser Ali-Ahmad
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254 Marianne, Madoré. (2016). "The Peaceful Settlement of Syrian Refugees in the Eastern suburbs of Beirut: Understanding the causes of social stability", Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support, 2016-03-01 00:00:00
Read More at: https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/peaceful-settlement-syrian-refugees-eastern-suburbs-beirut-understanding-causes-socialCopyright ©Lebanon Support.
walking on the main roads of the city were also implemented.\footnote{255} Moreover, under the orders of the head of the municipality, the municipal police closed all the shops and business managed by Syrian refugees and even urged Lebanese business owners to prioritize hiring Lebanese before foreigners.\footnote{256} In Baalbek as well, thirty percent of all Syrian nationals in the city were evicted by the municipal police. Those who resisted were all arrested and handcuffed to set an example. Curfews between 8PM and 6AM were implemented first and the municipality hardened it to 6PM till 6AM after one single refugee broke the curfew.\footnote{257} The municipal police also started forming checkpoints at random hours and places where most Syrian refugees were detained to make sure that they had legal papers, and all Syrian households were frequently searched to investigate if terrorists and violent extremists are hiding amongst the foreigners.\footnote{258} Finally, a similar pattern can be seen in Halba’s municipality. Indeed, not only did it impose curfews from 8PM onwards but according to the Humans Right Watch, several refugees have claimed that, when trying to renew their papers, municipal officials have mistreated them, often beating them and taking their UNHCR papers.\footnote{259} The municipality also installed cameras to surveil the streets more especially next to areas where refugees reside.\footnote{260}

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\footnote{256} Interview with Dekwaneh head of municipality Mr. Antoine Shakhtoura
\footnote{258} Interview with Baalbek head of municipality Mr. Hussein El-Lakkis
\footnote{260} Interview with Halba head of municipality Mr. Abdel Hamid Al- Halabi
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To conclude, after having portrayed and framed the Syrian refugee issue as a security threat, the different municipalities implemented extraordinary measures to solve that threat. These measures such as the curfews were illegal as they violated the Lebanese law that states that only the Council of Minister can enforce a curfew and breached agreements between Lebanon and Syria such as the right of free movement in territories of both countries. Since there is no provision law in Lebanon that would allow municipalities to either issue their own IDs for Syrians or charge them money for them, the new municipal identification cards were illegal as well.

4.4 Internalization of the Securitization process

As stated in chapter 1, securitization is only successful once the audience "internalizes" the threat and believes that the use of extraordinary measures was justified. The following section will shed light on how the Lebanese population internalized that Syrian refugees are a threat and that the measures that were adopted by the municipalities were necessary to preserve national and societal security. I will first show how the Lebanese media has replicated and disseminated the same security discourse adopted in policy spheres. Second, I will allude to surveys already conducted by the Lebanese Center for Policy Research in collaboration with International Alert and by the Political Science Institute at USJ in collaboration with UNHCR. These surveys show that Lebanon’s public sphere has also embraced the security discourse.

261 “Examining curfews against Syrians” (2014). Civil Society Knowledge Center. Available at: http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/content/examining-curfews-against-syrians-lebanon-0
4.4.1 Role of the Lebanese Media

The media in general has an essential role in framing and constructing public opinion as it has the power and ability to endorse a particular point of view of any issue. In the Syrian refugee’s case, the Lebanese media has exaggerated the threats they pose on the country’s different sectors, which has affected how the Lebanese population perceives them. The media has then mirrored the process of securitization that was executed by both municipality leaders and political elites in the country. In fact, International alert analyzed how published printed reports portray Syrian refugees in Lebanon in the 10 most read newspapers in the country between 2012 and 2014 and came up with the conclusion that a staggering 64% of the reports portray refugees as a threat on Lebanon’s economy and its infrastructure. This type of coverage was lower in newspapers affiliated with the March 8 block (39%). Nonetheless, all newspapers reported problems on security and social cohesion levels. Furthermore, it was also deduced that most newspapers overemphasize crime stories involving Syrians such as prostitution, stealing, murder and rape. Newspapers have also opted to headline their front page with titles that are “anti-refugees such as: “Before Lebanon becomes a depot for refugees” and “Syrians are about to turn Hamra to Sawda”. The latter is a title that has a racist rhetoric as it implies that Hamra, a district in Lebanon with a name that means red in Arabic is about to turn black because

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265 Ibid
266 Ibid
of the darker-skinned Syrian refugees.\textsuperscript{267} To add, a study has shown that in host countries such as Lebanon, media reports represent Syrian refugees using water and natural disaster metaphors. By doing so, they draw an image of Syrians as an unwelcomed disaster and detach them of their human traits.\textsuperscript{268} Indeed, the study also compares and contrast how the media represents Syrian refugees in both a host country such as Lebanon and a non-host country (country without Syrian refugees); a comparison that showed that in the former, Syrians are significantly more referred to with words such as “flood”, “outflow”, “stream” and “burden”, which emphasizes how these host countries suffer from refugees.\textsuperscript{269} This strategy is to dissipate panic and alarm in the population’s mind that will consequently perceive Syrians as a danger and security threat. Finally, in a comparative analysis of how Arabic – Al Manar and El Nashra - and English news sources frame Syrian refugees, it was deducted that Arabic stations are more likely to frame Syrians as intruders who pose a cultural, economic and security threat on the host country and who seek to engage in illegal and criminal activities.\textsuperscript{270} Finally, after a content analysis of two of arguably the biggest Lebanese newspapers, which are An-Nahar and As-Safir, the results showed that the Lebanese media routinely refers to the Syrian asylum seekers as a


threat. Indeed, the findings revolved around three main themes: firstly, that “Lebanon’s economy is at peril” since refugees are not only stealing jobs but they are also leaving safe Syrian areas in order to get the international organization’s aid, second, that refugees would only lead to Lebanon’s collapse since they are a time bomb and a hazard to the state’s security through their militarization, and violent extremist nature and finally, that “they will reignite the civil war” since they are a threat to the demographic balance in a political system highly dependent on sectarianism. Thus, the media which is mainly controlled by Lebanese political parties is playing a pivotal role in scapegoating Syrian refugees and blaming them for all of Lebanon’s woes and problems.

4.4.2 Lebanese citizens’ perceptions of security threat

The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) and International Alert collaborated together to conduct a survey which aimed at analyzing why Lebanese felt threatened by the Syrian refugees and whether they believed in the success of the security measures that were implemented. In order to do so, questionnaires were conducted with a sample size of 260 Lebanese citizens who were all selected neutrally by a systematic random


272 Ibid


sampling. Men constituted approximately 59% of the sample size while women amounted for 41% and the age range of participants varied from 16 to 81 years old. The sample also included citizens from governorates all around Lebanon. The study concluded that most Lebanese identify Syrians as the main threat in Lebanon due to the fact that they are a security challenge on different sectors, which has rendered the Lebanese citizens increasingly intolerant to the issue. Indeed, over 75% of the respondents stated that the large waves of refugees made them feel insecure on at least one of the three security sectors – demographic, economic and societal.

In fact, when it comes to the perceptions of demographic fear, 51% of the people interviewed believed that Lebanon’s sectarian balance was greatly affected by the arrival of refugees and that the situation could harvest an extreme radicalization process, which would lead to more terrorism and higher crime rates, while 70% were afraid that sectarian violence was bound to happen. It is important to note that although the majority of the respondents who were not skeptical, were Sunnis-which is the same sect of the majority of Syrian refugees- most of them also admitted that the clashes in Arsal have changed their perceptions as they fear terrorists might be hiding in their communities. Another popular trend in the answers obtained was sects accusing one another of exploiting the issue for political gains. As for the perceptions of economic threat, 72% of the respondents reported that they don’t perceive Syrian refugees as a threat to their personal

276 Ibid P.3
277 Ibid P.4
278 Ibid P. 5
economy however, 74% perceive them as threat to other Lebanese. Moreover, 83% see Syrian refugees as the sole blame for the decline in accessibility and reliability of services and resources such as access to clean water and electricity. Most interviewees also specified that the fact that Syrians do not pay taxes makes them feel that they are not helping the municipalities of the towns and cities where they are residing, despite the fact that these same municipalities have to pay a lot of money to provide aid and assistance to them. To continue, when it comes to the perceptions on the societal level, respondents’ answers varied depending on their sect. Indeed, 95% of the Christians interviewed stated that they were threatened by Syrian’s ethical values and cultural practices while the percentage was minimal among Sunnis and Shias. Nonetheless, 65% of respondents stated they fear that violence and tension would worsen due to the fact that different lifestyles and customs of both communities were bound to clash. Finally, when asked about the measures taken by municipalities such as increasing patrols, curfews, surveillance cameras and evictions, 73% of the respondents believed that those measures were necessary to reduce hazards and dangers refugees pose.

Adding to this, the Political Science Institute at USJ conducted, in collaboration with UNHCR, a study to analyze the perception of Lebanese citizens towards displaced Syrians. The sample they interviewed consisted of 600 Lebanese that were chosen neutrally and without premeditation from cities where Syrians reside and interact with the

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280 Ibid P. 8
281 Ibid
host community.\textsuperscript{282} The results showed that 69\% of interviewees would never hire a Syrian refugee to work due to the fact that they are taking the job away from a Lebanese person. Moreover, when asked if they feel safe in their cities, the percentage of people answering adversely varied between 62\% and 14\%. It is important to note that this number was directly proportional with the number of Syrians residing in the areas. To explain, 62\% felt they were threatened in areas where a huge density of Syrians can be found, and in the areas where only a few refugees live 14\% stated they felt unsafe. Finally, 68\% reported that they heard stories in the media that made them feel more scared and in danger.\textsuperscript{283}

Both surveys then show that the Lebanese population felt in grave danger and at risk, suggesting that they believed that measures taken by different local actors are necessary for their safety. This means that the Lebanese population has generally “internalized” the speech act that Syrians constitute a security threat, revealing a relational and mutually constitutive dynamic between policy and public spheres.

\textbf{4.5 Counter-narrative: Efforts to de-securitize Syrian refugees}

Despite the fact that the large influx of refugees has created a general feel of negativity and hostility in Lebanon, it is important to note that some actors do not share the same animosity and have embarked on efforts to de-securitize the issue. In fact, various

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initiatives were set in place with a view to ‘desecuritizing’ the Syrian refugee issue. Before elaborating on the efforts of those trying to de-securitize Syrian refugees, an explanation of de-securitization of migration is a must. According to Huysmans, while securitization is the framing of a migrant as a security threat to a community’s inner sphere of peace that might lead to the death of not only the community’s citizens but also their traditions and cultures, the de-securitization process consists of breaking down of this “unified other as a threat” rhetoric into a much more fragmented identity.\footnote{Jef, Huysmans. (1998). "The question of the limit: Desecuritisation and the aesthetics of horror in political realism." \textit{Millennium} Volume 27.3 P.569-589.} To explain, actors trying to de-securitize refugees who are being perceived as a menace try to fragment the “other” into an identity that is much more familiar to the audience. The goal of de-securitization is thus to change the identity of the object in the audience’s mind to a much more docile one. De-securitization then turns “alien threats” into “families”, “mothers”, “children”, “fathers” and a plethora of other identities that one can easily sympathize with.\footnote{Jef, Huysmans. (1998). "The question of the limit: Desecuritisation and the aesthetics of horror in political realism." \textit{Millennium} Volume 27.3 P.569-589.} Applying this theory to the Lebanese case, different actors tried to diffuse the tension between host communities and the foreigners in order to change the Lebanese hostile perceptions that were dominant. Indeed, many NGOs noticed that the interaction between both parties was minimal to say the least, which made them believe that this was further strengthening negative stereotypes each community had of the other. In order to reinforce empathy and solidarity, the same NGOs decided to bridge this gap between communities by creating safe environments where they can meet one another, share their concerns and their struggles and more importantly get to know one another; this resulted in a diffuse in
tension and stronger bonds. For example, the Kayany foundation, a Lebanese NGO, was established as a response to the Syrian crisis. This NGO brought Lebanese and Syrians together by asking for Lebanese volunteers to help establish “portable” schools in the Bekaa valley. It has successfully provided free education to more than 3,500 Syrian refugees in Lebanon and its main vision is that only education will bring both communities together. Furthermore, the Project for the Legal Support for Syrian Refugees and Palestinians, also known as the PLSSRP is an organization composed of Lebanese and Syrian lawyers who volunteer to try to teach refugees about the Lebanese Law. The PLSSRP’s goal is to help refugees obtain a legal residence in Lebanon. This local NGO was also joined by another, The Legal Agenda, which fought really hard against the Lebanese government when the latter decided to adopt stricter Visa requirements to any Syrian wishing to enter Lebanon. To add, CARE International started a project in which Syrian and Lebanese fathers meet in order to discuss their role in the family, their biggest struggle, what makes them happy and what their definition of a perfect family is. The NGO also asked them to share pictures of their families and those pictures toured the country in an exhibition. CARE International explained that the rationale behind this photography exhibition was to appeal to the Lebanese’ humanitarian

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286 Interview with Ms. Najla Hammoud, Advisor to previous Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Mouin Merehbi
288 Ibid
290 Ibid
side by showing them that Syrians are families just like they are. Another example of an NGO initiative was a center that started hosting inter-community workshops on enhancing skills like cooking and baking, in order to bring people together and show them their commonalities. Many participants have admitted that their perception changed after these workshops. Moreover, UN agencies are vital in building bridges rather than barriers since most interactions between the different communities occur at events and locations that they organize. Indeed, UNHCR has built a network of more than twenty-five community building centers where hosts and foreigners meet daily in the hope that a sense of unity and camaraderie grows. The centers are full of classrooms where different subjects such as English, French, hairdressing sewing and computer literacy are being taught to both Syrians and Lebanese. They also plan “life-skill” workshops such as public speaking, time management, accepting one another and diplomacy. Psychologists offer free advice as well and there is a small playground in each center for kids to play at. More than 140 people from both nationalities attend each center daily and many participants have stated that they feel safer and much more relaxed since they started attending the center where they even made new friends. UNHCR has also helped municipalities with the burden of refugees by donating heavy equipment and machinery such as solid waste collection trucks and bobcats and by drilling additional bore halls and

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292 Ibid


294 Interview with UNHCR Liaison Officer for Northern Lebanon, Mr. Khaled Kabbara
flood mitigation channels to lower the pollution that is resulting from the overpopulation. The World Bank is also trying to de-securitize Syrians by partnering up with municipalities and unions of municipalities through different projects, in order to help them develop on an economically. One of those projects is called “Municipal Service Emergency Project” and has objectives like enhancing social cohesion, financing interventions that would help people in their daily lives and supporting local businesses to grow. Indeed, to help municipalities deal with the influx of refugees, the World Bank has donated garbage compactors, power generators, water supply networks and sewage networks and is also working on opening gardens where people from all nationalities can enter for free. Finally, the Danish Refugee Council is also helping local municipalities by donating life-saving items to any municipality that shelters refugees during the cold winters of Lebanon.

295 Ibid
297 Ibid
Chapter Five

Concluding remarks and synthesis of findings

This thesis has unpacked the securitization dynamic that Lebanese municipalities adopted vis-à-vis the Syrian refugee issue in the absence of a national framework. To that end, it analyzed the components of the securitization of migration, such as speech acts and securitized migration policies, and illustrated how municipalities took measures that suspended “normal” politics in order to deal with the issue that they framed as a security threat. Since, as previously said, the history of the issue plays a big role in the internalization of the earnestness of adopting extraordinary measures, the thesis went over the past experiences that Lebanese municipalities had while dealing with refugees and took into consideration the relations between Lebanese and Syrians in the past.

A question that inspires reflections for further study revolves consists in unravelling the incentives municipal leaders and political elites have in securitizing refugee politics. As aforementioned, one of the main benefits of the municipal bureaucratic maze or what can also be called the “institutional ambiguity” on both the government and the municipal level, was to ensure that Syrian refugees’ lives were so insecure, volatile and dangerous, that they would never consider settling down indefinitely and that new refugees would be discouraged from entering the country now and in the future.299 In fact, even if opaque

policies are often ineffective as they cannot be implemented fully, they create a sense of fear which ultimately leads to refugees leaving. Hence, in the long run, the “limbo” refugees find themselves in, will help Lebanon achieve its priorities that were previously discussed when analyzing the LCRP. Furthermore, different stakeholders have also benefited from the established vagueness. To explain, municipalities were not the only actors to exploit the vacuum left by the government, as there were other indispensable “middlemen” to the informal governance system who took a leading role. Indeed, this system allowed a lot of uncontrolled profitmaking and gave power to individuals acting as sponsors for Syrians. To elaborate, without a sponsor, Syrians were not allowed to legally work, which made Syrians dependent on them; a dependency that more often than not was exploited by the Lebanese sponsors. Additionally, the system paved way for the formation of illegal businesses such as selling aid at a higher price, facilitating the sponsorship process, smuggling refugees to Europe and selling medicine at an inflated rate. Unfortunately, a lot of the profiteers from such actions were linked to municipalities which are backed, themselves, by political parties. Even humanitarian agencies working throughout these ambiguous policies opted to work around the system and used informal systems which only gave more power and leverage to municipalities.

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302 Ibid


and local authorities. In fact, some municipalities for example, started negotiating deals with the UNHCR where the latter implemented infrastructural projects in cities while municipalities in return, vowed to accept more refugees in their cities. Syrian refugees were thus governed through subjectively implemented and constantly abused laws which resulted in them having to rely on informal networks and channels to acquire their rights and basic services. The permanent spaces of administrative limbo have benefited municipalities as it has allowed them to gain power. To further unpack the benefits of the securitization that happened, it is important to shed light on the fact that Lebanese political parties – which control mainly all municipalities in Lebanon - have been facing a lot of backlash and criticism in the past few years due to the fact the Lebanese population is tired of living in corruption, poverty and unemployment. Indeed, going back to the survey that was conducted by International Alert and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, when asked if they still believed that the political parties they had voted for could save or salvage the situation in Lebanon, only 22% answered affirmatively. There is accordingly a general disappointment when it comes to party politics and the way Lebanon is being governed. Street protests alongside populist social movements like the You Stink movement that erupted after the garbage crisis that had hit the county only increased the pressure on politicians who were being blamed for failing at everything; from fixing the roads and enhancing the infrastructure, to providing electricity for every

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305 Ibid
household, clean water, job opportunities and access to healthcare. Consequently, the securitization of Syrian refugees and more importantly, their framing as a security threat, was a blame game by politicians who used the influx of refugees as a scapegoat and attacked them for being responsible for the country’s pain. By generating fear, politicians were able to distract the Lebanese citizens to ease off the pressure they were facing.

Investigating the motives underlying the securitization process at the municipal level should not disregard the constraints and difficulties municipalities faced in the context of massive displacement. Still, it is pivotal to gain an insight into some of the motives that catalyzed the securitization process. Additionally, when it comes to understanding the dynamics of securitization and its variation across municipalities, the number of refugees residing in each municipal area probably played a big role in whether the municipality chose to securitize the refugee issue or not. For example, in the eight case studies where securitization took place, the number of refugees was enormous. Indeed, in Zahle there was an increase of UNHCR registration assistants from 15 to 21, due to the fact that, for a certain period of time, between 1,200 and 1,300 refugees were being registered daily – keeping in mind that number of unofficial refugees was even higher - making Zahle the area with the biggest number of refugees in Lebanon. In Halba, Syrians outnumber Lebanese by a factor of two to one which led to UNHCR marking it as vulnerable locality.

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309 Interview with Carnegie Middle East Center Director of Communications, Dr. Mohanad Haje Ali
under pressure. In Dekwaneh, there are more than 11,000 refugees and the city is right next to a Palestinian camp that has more than 60,000 refugees. Bourj Hammoud has hosted close to 20,000 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis, which is one-fifth of its 100,000 population and thus makes it the city with the largest amount of Syrian refugees in the Metropolitan area. In Kfar-Rimman there are more than 8,000 refugees in a town that has 9000 Lebanese citizens, and in Baysarieh, there are 9,000 refugees in a town that only has 4,500 Lebanese citizens. In cities where municipalities embarked on a de-securitization process, the number of residing refugees residing was much smaller. Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the importance of the role religion played. Undeniably, the head of the Maronite Church Patriarch Bechara Boutros Rai has on numerous occasions stated that the mostly Sunni refugee community arriving to the country only added to the woes of the Christian community in Lebanon which is already outnumbered by its Muslim counterpart and this created a hostile feeling of anxiety and stress, where Christians are starting to feel like strangers inside their houses. Christian leaders’ populist rhetoric implied on numerous occasions

312 Ibid
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316 Interview with Ms. Najla Hammoud, Advisor to previous Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Mouin Mehrbi
that if Syrians were to stay in Lebanon it would lead to a demographic imbalance and eventually to the downfall of Christians.\textsuperscript{318} Similarly, as aforementioned, the Sunni-Shia divide has intensified in Lebanon in the wake of Syria’s civil war and its spillovers. In fact, Shia political leaders stressed on the fact that incoming refugees were mainly Sunni, which facilitated the process of framing them as a danger to the sectarian balance in the municipalities they govern. Securitization therefore happened in cities where the majority of the citizens are Christians and Shia.\textsuperscript{319} Furthermore, another notable aspect of the securitization of Syrian refugees that differs from previous securitization processes of Palestinians and Iraqis, is that municipalities were much more heavily involved in the practice. This can be explained by the fact that unlike the Palestinian refugees who were mainly located in refugee camps, Syrians were dispersed in more than 1,500 cities in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{320}

In conclusion, this thesis shines a light on the logic driving the securitization of migration in contexts characterized by ineffective governance. The securitization does not only happen when political institutions and leaders fear for their country’s security. Although in some cases, the “alien” might indeed be a threat on so many different levels such as: economic, cultural, ecological and demographic balance, securitization might in other cases be instrumentalized and used as a political tool or tactic by politicians in order to justify their own failures and shortcomings. The securitization process and the perceived


\textsuperscript{319} Interview with Carnegie Middle East Center Director of Communications, Dr. Mohanad Haje Ali

\textsuperscript{320} Dalya, Mitri. (2014). "Challenges of aid coordination in a complex crisis: An overview of funding policies and conditions regarding aid provision to Syrian refugees in Lebanon." CivilSociety P. 15
threats that result from it, help in creating a bond between political parties and citizens whereby citizens fear for their survival and thus fully support political elites. The latter become capable of shifting their own status and image from failing politicians to heroes fighting for the existence and security of the society.

Finally, it is true that politicians took advantage of the refugee crisis and securitized the issue in order to benefit from newly set regulations that are in their favor. However, it is also obvious that the current international refugee framework is limited and flawed. In that sense, securitization did not only happen for the advantage of the political elite, but also due to the huge number of incoming refugees that were able to enter the country because of its very loose policies and rules. Therefore, it is crucial to revamp and improve the refugee system to prevent this occurrence from happening again. A healthier international refugee management structure and stricter screening processes for displaced people flowing into the country would result in a better geographical distribution of refugees and a safer and more prosperous environment. This would consequently help first asylum countries as there will be more burden-sharing. Consequently, the repercussions and challenges that refugees pose to hosting countries would be directly treated and this would hopefully lead to more tolerance and acceptance of refugees in countries of resettlement.
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Appendices

Interview questionnaire:

1. How does the municipality perceive Syrians? What is the legal status of Syrians in municipalities?
2. Are Syrians considered a threat/liability or an asset? Why?
3. Does the municipality make a link between security and Syrian refugees? How?
4. What were the threats and the burdens the municipality faced with the large influx of Syrian refugees?
5. What measures has the municipality implemented as a direct response to the refugee crisis? (Legal measures, policy measures, initiatives). Could you give detailed examples?
6. How has the municipality implemented/enforced these measures? Describe the process.
7. Are these measures legal or are they exceptional?
8. How did the municipality convince its citizens of the necessity of adopting those measures?
9. Was there resistance or critique on the part of international NGOs and local civil society? What was the critique?
10. Did the municipality face any problem with the government when implementing the measures?

Transcript of names of peoples that were interviewed.

- Mr. Abdel Hamid Al-Halabi, Halba head of the municipality of Halba
- Mr. Antoine Shakhtoura, head of the municipality of Dekweneh
- Mr. Camil Ammoury, council member in the municipality of Zahle
- Mr. Hussein El-Lakkis, head of the municipality of Baalbek
- Mr. Khaled Kabbara, Liaison Officer for Northern Lebanon of the UNHCR
- Mr. Maroun Dina, head of the municipality of Mezyara
- Dr. Mohanad Haje Ali, Director of Communications of Carnegie Middle East Center
- Ms. Najla Hammoud, Advisor to previous Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Mouin Merebhi
- Mr. Nazih Ali Abed, head of the municipality of Baysariyeh
- Mr. Samir Mallo, council member in the municipality of Zahle
- Mr. Yaser Ali-Ahmad, head of the municipality of Kfar-Rimman
- Council member in the municipality of Bourj Hammoud who wished to stay anonymous.