

**LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

The Securitization and De-securitization of Syrian  
Refugees in the Lebanese Newspapers and Through the  
Lens of Refugees' Narratives.

By  
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A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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## Dedication Page

To my precious and supportive family, and to every refugee.

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The Securitization and De-securitization of Syrian Refugees in the Lebanese  
Newspapers and Through the Lens of Refugees' Narratives.

Bahdja Sehli

ABSTRACT

With the outbreak of Syria's conflict in 2011, more than five million displaced Syrians sought refuge in neighboring countries, including Lebanon. These host countries have however portrayed their displacement as temporary and have taken restrictive measures to limit refugee influx and control mobility. In Lebanon, a country of "no-asylum", displaced Syrians struggled with deteriorating livelihoods and an acute climate of securitization, compounded by historical and political tensions. Against this backdrop, the Lebanese print media, that internalized political factions' speech acts, heavily engaged with the theme of refugees as security, economic and social threats. Still, unlike many accounts that portrayed this engagement as monolithic, this thesis argues that newspapers offered heterogeneous conceptions of the issue of refugee securitization. It also shows how Syrian refugees have in turn produced narratives to challenge prevalent media misconceptions. To explore the complex field of securitization versus de-securitization in the context of Syrian forced migration, this research will critically unpack how Lebanese newspapers have framed Syrian refugees through various discursive perspectives and platforms. More specifically, it will shed light on how two Lebanese newspapers, *Annahar* and *Al Akhbar*, have dealt with the issue of securitizing displacement from Syria, and how they have constructed various narratives and counter-narratives vis-à-vis refugeeness. In more specific terms, the research argues

that while *Annahar* transmitted and vehiculated politicians' security speech acts, *Al Akhbar* offered a discursive platform that allowed for rethinking refugeeness as a security threat. To provide a complimentary perspective, the research will examine how Syrian refugees have in turn resisted securitization through conveying their voices and producing counter-frames that challenged securitized portrayals. In so doing, the thesis will contribute to the complex literature on the processes, dynamics, and factors underlying the securitization and de-securitization of forced migration.

Keywords: Securitization, De-securitization, Counter-narratives, Self-representation, Media, Syrian Refugees, Discourse.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction and Background

In the context of a mass uprising to which the regime responded with a crackdown, Syria has been embroiled in a protracted ‘civil war’ since 2011. At the onset of the conflict, the conditions rapidly deteriorated resulting in the prevalence of internal displacement as well as the forced migration of many Syrians who struggled to find safe areas within the country. This humanitarian crisis generated the highest number of refugees since World War II. It forced almost 12 million people to flee their homes, approximately 6.2 million are internally displaced while 5.6 million are refugees (Reid, 2020), mostly in countries that border Syria. Lebanon, for example, hosts more than one million Syrians in its territories (Nilsson & Badran, 2019), which means it accommodates the highest number of Syrian refugees per capita (UNHCR, 2020 a).

‘Refugee’ is a legal term that indicates the status of some type of involuntary migrants, but it is also used beyond the legal context. For a formal definition, a refugee is a person who ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality’ and who is unable to, or unwilling to, return to the country of origin (UNHCR, 2020 b). Casually speaking, the word refugee generally conjures up images of crowded boats, poor children, tents, and the like. However, regardless of the kind of these portrayals, i.e. whether negative or positive, there are several factors that evoke our visualizations of refugees.

The way the refugee identity is constructed by the politics and the media of the host country plays a major role in people's perceptions about refugees. In Lebanon, politicians play an active role in shaping the image of Syrian refugees with the aim of influencing public opinion towards this group so that they justify the strict measures applied to them. The small country, which is governed by a sectarian power-sharing formula, first adopted an open-border policy in the face of Syrian displacement in 2011. However by 2014, as Syria's conflict escalated, the Lebanese government enforced harsh restrictions which led to the closure of borders by 2015. In May of that year, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) stopped registering refugees. Also, displaced Syrians were denied the right to labor (Lenner & Schmelter, 2016). This restriction is in contradiction with the previous open-door policy to labor migration where Syrian voluntary migrants were welcomed to work in Lebanon for years before the crisis (ILO, 2015). One of the real reasons behind this new policy was the intention to reduce the new arrivals of forced displaced individuals (Lenner & Schmelter, 2016). Against this backdrop, Lebanese politicians constructed Syrian refugees as an economic, security and social threat. Let's consider for example the political discourse of former foreign minister Gebran Bassil, who described Syrian refugees as the reason behind instability and unemployment issues in Lebanon (Geha & Talhouk, 2018). The portrayal of Syrian refugees as threats arises from complex and intersecting legacies. It stems from several reasons, including the sectarian nature of the Lebanese political system, the polarization of political views regarding the Syrian regime, and Lebanon's experiences with other refugees, especially Palestinians. Indeed, the theme of refugee flight in Lebanon is laden with various connotations that are intricately linked to neighboring conflicts, instability and turmoil. Lebanon hosts a large number of refugees from different countries, notably

Iraqis and Palestinians along with other nationalities. Today, there are around 175,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (LPDC, 2018)- according to a census completed in January, 2018- while this number was known to be much higher in the past few years. Additionally, there were 14,322 Iraqi refugees registered with the UNHCR as of late 2018 (UNHCR, 2019). Of course, all of the aforementioned statistics do not reflect the real total number of refugees in Lebanon as many of them are not registered with the UN. Notwithstanding previous instances of policy friction with displaced individuals, the sheer size of the Syrian refugee population exacerbated resentment and placed immense strains on the country's infrastructure and economy.

Under this political and securitizing background, it is important to highlight the fact that the media often engage with political themes. However, this can be either to support or criticize them. In the case of the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the media played an important role in framing the image of Syrian refugees in a manner that both support as well as misrepresent them.

Indeed, some Lebanese media outlets cannot be trusted for a fair and balanced representation of Syrian refugees. As Dajani (2012) mentioned, the Lebanese media are a collection of politicized and sectarian outlets that present views and comments rather than news and facts. Basically, every outlet filters the voice and the specific issues of a certain political faction. Additionally, media institutions in Lebanon lack financial self-sufficiency, which creates the need to accept subsidies and aid from external sources in exchange for following their agendas (Dajani, 2012). In this view, media outlets amplify the voices of the stakeholders that fund them, evolving easily into politicized channels. Evidently, presenting information based on others' agendas rather than the actual reality explains the resulting unbalanced content in some media

outlets. As White (2015) mentioned, opportunism, political bias, and the weakening economy of media lead to social exclusion, stereotypes, and hate speech directed towards refugees. In addition, Lebanese newspapers represent two different political camps, i.e. the March 8 and the March 14 Alliances, that have acted as governing powers in Lebanon's legislatures and cabinets for more than a decade now. The former is a Lebanese coalition of political parties that are pro-Syrian government; whereas, the latter is a coalition of Lebanese independents and political parties that are anti-Syria and in opposition to March 8 Alliance.

Against this backdrop, the above-mentioned arguments spoke about Lebanon's media in a general way; yet while media may support its partisan leadership in several issues, there are some exceptions to this when the topic revolves around the issue of Syrian forced migration in Lebanon.

## **1.1 Research Problematique**

Through the lens of the securitization theory which is the process of framing a particular problem as an existential threat in the eyes of the public with the aim of justifying the adoption of exceptional measures to tackle it (Waeber, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998), and by drawing on the de-securitization theory which is according to Hansen (2012), moving a subject out of the security sphere, my research shows how Lebanese print media have heavily engaged with the theme of refugees as security, economic and social threats. Still, unlike many accounts that portrayed this engagement as monolithic, this thesis argues that newspapers offered heterogeneous conceptions of the issue of refugee securitization. To explore the complex field of discursive securitization versus de-securitization in the context of forced displacement, this research will critically unpack how Lebanese newspapers framed Syrian refugees through various perspectives even though politicians converged on

portraying displaced Syrians as security threats through their speech acts. Drawing on illustrative examples derived from two main newspapers in the media landscape, *Annahar* and *Al Akhbar*, my thesis argues that Lebanese newspapers offered various accounts of the extent to which Syrian refugees can be considered as threats. While *Annahar* replicated the speech acts of politicians highlighting refugees as threats, *Al Akhbar* offered a discursive platform that allows for de-securitizing discourse around the theme of displacement. For a complimentary analysis, my work explores how Syrian refugees have resisted some mainstream portrayals by embarking on a pathway of de-securitization or by sharing counter-narratives that challenged and resisted securitization. By sharing their stories in various blogs and media outlets, they sought to debunk prevalent narratives and amplify their voices.

Against this backdrop, my thesis will then seek to answer the two-folded question: How have Lebanese newspapers engaged with the issue of displacement in times of securitization, and how have Syrian refugees portrayed themselves in various platforms with a view to conveying their own voices and reversing some dominant narratives?

In grappling with these questions, the thesis will contribute to the complex literature on the processes, dynamics, and factors underlying the securitization and de-securitization of forced migration. More specifically, it will show how media may offer conflicting discursive perspectives on refugee securitization even though politicians may have agreed on framing displaced individuals as societal, economic and political threats. Furthermore, this thesis will fill in some research gaps regarding the portrayal of refugee voices and narratives. Indeed, there are few studies that researched how Syrian refugees reframed themselves in response to media securitization in Lebanon. Also, refugee voices have not only been absent in media

content but also in the majority of studies that examined the misrepresentation of Syrian refugees. On this basis, my thesis will further illustrate how Syrian refugees have attempted to resist securitization through conveying their voices and producing counter-frames that challenged securitized portrayals.

## **1.2 Methodology**

### **1.2.1 Method of Analysis**

For an in-depth analysis of the mediatized securitizing and de-securitizing discourses, I opted for a qualitative case study analysis. In this study, I first drew on the literature review to provide context for my thesis by integrating previous research that analyzed the representations of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese media and the efforts that have been done to de-securitize Syrian refugees or encourage the spread of their voices in Lebanon. In order to collect the primary data, I scrutinized the online media texts of my chosen outlets through the qualitative discourse analysis method.

Throughout this analysis, the selected texts were closely analyzed to determine the deployed themes, statements, texts' structural features, any cultural or historical references, as well as the linguistic or rhetorical techniques that the media discourse drew on in framing Syrian refugees. Furthermore, this method will also be applied to the online content of the Syrian refugees' self-framing.

As Mey asserted, according to the Copenhagen School, security politics are discursively constructed, and variables in linguistics have real impacts on the dynamics of the politics of the world (as cited in Balzacq, 2005). Streeter (2013) also mentioned that discourse analysis is a means of engaging political questions of the contemporary world. On this basis, this method is suitable for this type of research

that is informed by the securitization and de-securitization theories which heavily rely on speech acts. Indeed, the discursive side of securitization and de-securitization is highly significant due to the nature of language that is both linguistically performative and cognitively intersubjective.

What also makes this methodological choice appropriate for this thesis is the fact that it allows the researcher to go through the language to discover the latent meanings and strands between discourse and context. As Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) mentioned, the writer has the power to construct representations of the text as well as those of the social context, further explaining that both are actually interwoven.

Basically, due to this function of discourse analysis, one can investigate the rhetorical devices that shape securitization and de-securitization as well as the mechanisms that put the presented arguments into context. Accumulating this academic knowledge on this method assures the efficiency of discourse analysis for this thesis.

### **1.2.2 Case Study Selection and Data Collection**

As noted earlier, the above method of analysis will be applied to the online texts of the two Lebanese newspapers, *Annahar* and *Al Akhbar*, that were chosen as my illustrative case study sample. My selection was based on popularity -according to the ranking results produced by the Northwestern University in Qatar (as cited in MOM, 2018 a) - as this criterion indicates a higher number of people reached.

*Annahar* is the second most popular Arabic daily newspaper in Lebanon founded by the prominent journalist Gebran Tuani and later managed by his son Ghassan and his grandson Gebran who was a strong critic of the Syrian government and assassinated in 2005 (CPJ., n.d.). This outlet has adopted a historical moderate right stance and supported the March 14 Alliance, a coalition of political parties in Lebanon that were critical of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon's political affairs and that called on

Hezbollah, Lebanon's Shia-based party, to renounce its military arsenal. In 2000, this newspaper launched its website Naharnet that publishes in Arabic and English. In my study, I will analyze the Arabic content. The other well-known Lebanese daily newspaper that ranks third in popularity is *Al-Akhbar* launched by Joseph Samaha, a leftist intellectual who stood with Hezbollah's pro-Syrian and anti-Western camp, along with Ibrahim Al Amine, a fierce supporter of Hezbollah. The latter politically aligns with March 8 Alliance, a coalition of political parties in Lebanon that calls for closed cooperation with the Syrian regime and that hails Hezbollah as necessary resistance in the face of potential Israeli aggression. This press describes itself as liberal and independent; however, it is considered openly supportive of Hezbollah (O'Driscoll, 2018). Concerning the language of publication, both of its print and online version publish solely in Arabic. It is worth mentioning that the first famous newspaper according to this study is *Al Joumhouria*; however, since I could not access the archives on its website, I chose the second and third famous newspaper.

For the purpose of collecting data from these outlets, I utilized the search engines of the selected outlets' websites through which I typed the following keywords 'النازحين' and 'الملاجئين السوريين', which can be translated respectively as 'displaced Syrians' and 'Syrian refugees'. These terms were selected as an attempt to allow for a differentiation between the coverage of Syrians portrayed as "refugees" and those considered as "displaced" as per the Lebanese government's terminology that frames refugees as "nazihin", refusing to acknowledge their refugee status. Since I have opted to analyze media discourses during times of acute political securitization, I restricted my time frame to the period from April 25 until August 25, 2019. During this four-month period which preceded the 2019 October uprising, the government enforced several restrictive policies and actions that curbed Syrian refugees' access

to livelihoods and employment. There was furthermore political agreement that Syrian refugees presented a security as well as a societal threat to Lebanon's fragile dynamics. Against this backdrop, I automatically filtered the search results by setting my selected time frame. In *Annahar*, sixteen free articles were resulted from the searches, eleven of them securitized Syrian refugees, one article de-securitized them and four of them discussed refugees in regular terms. As for *Al Akhbar*, the results showed seventeen articles; ten articles of which de-securitized, two securitized, and five articles mentioned Syrian refugees in a normal context. For the purpose of this research, I read all free resulting articles and adopted the relevant texts for further analysis.

With regards to portraying refugee narratives, I did not draw on specific outlets. Rather the selection of my sample, that consists of ten stories, was primarily based on the results shown on Google Chrome and YouTube, which were guided by relevant search words in English and Arabic as Syrian refugees are known of commonly using the Arabic language in social media while NGOs publish mostly in English. I also filtered the results by customizing the time frame mentioned above. Some of the content are text, others are audiovisuals, so the latter were transcribed. For the sake of analyzing refugees' own narratives, I manually re-checked the results to select only the narratives that were told by Syrian refugees themselves, i.e. either their own complete stories, quotes, or interviews. The aim here is to look at alternative digital arenas and compare them to mainstream media outlets. The final database consisted mostly of narratives published in NGO websites or in refugee self-owned platforms.

### **1.2.3 Limitations of the Methodology**

There are academic and methodological limitations in this thesis. First, due to the novelty of the research topic, there are a few studies on how the Lebanese media

discursively securitized and de-securitized the refugee issue. The issue of the paucity is even more pronounced when it comes to the self-representation of various refugees, let alone the relatively recent Syrian refugee crisis. Methodologically, there is a lack of dissemination of the digitally published narratives of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. In addition to the restricted time frame I have chosen, the analyzed narratives showcasing refugee voices were limited. Therefore, a whole research dedicated fully to refugee narrative analysis in a wide time frame is needed. My current thesis, thus, does not claim full representativeness nor does it claim to cover the totality of platforms. Rather it focuses on illustrative strands and platforms that still convey an insight on the studied case. In addition, some of the selected alternative outlets published refugee narratives with an implied intention of collecting donations or advertising their platform; however, those stories were still analyzed because, according to Hansen (2012), de-securitization is achieved as a consequence of speech acts, yet in strict terms, there is no a de-security speech act. In other words, there is no narrative whereby the refugee is explicitly presented as a non-threatening human. Rather, de-securitization happens through various narratives with different themes and intentions.

### **1.3 Map of Thesis**

This thesis is divided into seven sections and structured as follows: Following the introduction, the second chapter provides a theoretical framework on securitization and de-securitization in the context of refugees. The third chapter sets out a review of previous studies on the issue of refugee securitization in Lebanon, focusing especially on the securitizing policies and speech acts of the Lebanese government towards previous refugees and the Syrians as well. This contributes to situating the Syrian case of displacement in the broader legal and historical context of Lebanon's

politics of asylum. To embed the Lebanese case in a broader perspective, this chapter also covers the portrayal of Syrian refugees in the global media and the efforts that have been done to counter media misconceptions against Syrian refugees. Chapter Four presents the recent securitizing policies on Syrian refugees in Lebanon; it then goes on to discuss the Lebanese media system and its link to the political landscape. In addition, it explores how the Lebanese media engaged with the theme of refugee securitization, as well as the efforts of the Lebanese civil society that have been undertaken to provide a platform for Syrian refugee voices. Chapter Five is dedicated to the analytical discussion of the collected findings of *Annahar* and *Al Akhbar* with a view to exploring how the discursive securitization of Syrian refugees has unfolded through two colliding narratives. The sixth chapter is the primary contribution of the research as it discusses the findings of the Syrian refugee narratives. The final concluding chapter revolves around a summary of the key findings as well as recommendations and suggestions for further research in this area.

## Chapter Two

### **Theoretical Framework: Securitization VS De-securitization of Forced Migration**

As discussed above, this thesis aims at applying the securitization and de-securitization theories to the portrayal of Syrian refugees in the two selected Lebanese newspapers. Therefore, this chapter is allocated to the whole framework of securitization, with a particular focus on the securitizing speech acts on forced migration, i.e. the first stage of this process. In addition, de-securitization and its various strategies will also be discussed below.

#### **2.1 The Nuanced Concept of Security**

Security initially occurred as an abstract and a contested term that evolved over studies. In the domain of international relations, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998), the leading scholars of the Copenhagen School (CS) of Security Studies, explicated this concept as the survival of a state or a nation in the face of an existential threat. According to the classical monosectoral definition, this threat was limited to military risks within a realist framework centered on the state (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). However, the aforementioned scholars revised the major concepts of security studies, and then further detailed their explanation in their book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* that was published in 1998. In this work, they primarily offered detailed definitions of the broadened security agenda that follows a multisectoral approach which touches not only the state but also the society; and through this, expands the type of threats beyond the military context (Wæver, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998). This sheds light on myriad kinds of security

ranging from political, societal, environmental, and economic (Wæver, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998). Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) clarified that the societal security concept is related to the community's identity that encompasses culture, language, customs, and religion. Linked to this concept is the notion that society will fail to survive if it is incapable of protecting its identity (Wæver, 1993). Moreover, Williams (2003) also contributed to this concept by mentioning that this threat can be related to the movement and the economic integration of people. Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) exemplified societal identities through religious identities as in the case of "Christians," or as Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2014) illustrated, through national identities such as "Germans". In terms of politics, the political sector involves threats against the government or state sovereignty, exclusive of military threats; as the latter is embedded in the military sector which is comprised of force-based threats, whether internal or external (Wæver, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998). With regard to the economic sector, it was posited that it basically includes anything that could adversely disturb the economic stability of the state (Wæver, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998). Lastly, environmental security consists of threats that harm the environment or environmental threats that negatively affect humans (Wæver, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998).

## **2.2 The Securitization Theory**

According to the definition that was introduced by the Copenhagen School, securitization is "positioning through speech acts of a particular issue as a threat to survival, which in turn enables emergency measures and the suspension of normal politics in dealing with an issue" (Wæver, Buzan, & de Wilde, 1998, p.78). In other words, securitization is an extreme form of regular politicization where an actor claims the right to exceptional measures to secure the survival of the audience by

framing a particular issue or subject as an existential threat. In this respect, the securitizing actor transfers the subject from the realm of normal democratic politics into the sphere of emergency politics that transcend compulsory regulations and rules. Waever, Buzan, and de Wilde (1998) delved deeper into the existential threat term and explained that it reflects a sense of emergency where everything would be irrelevant if we do not deal with the problem because by then we may not be present or free to tackle it in our own manner. Besides these core aspects of the securitization idea, Bright (2012) elucidated that the kernel of this theory is that no problem is a security threat per se; yet anything can be shaped as such. In more specific terms, a subject or an issue can become a security problem by solely labeling it as such. This means that the political evaluation of security issues is altered not due to the emergence of an actual existential threat, but because we, politically, choose to address or construct particular issues in a certain way.

The three elements of this theory, as classified by Waever, Buzan, and de Wilde (1998), are: the referent objects which are the things subjected to the existential threat, the securitizing actors who declare referent objects as existentially threatened, and the functional actors that refer to the influential agents in the security field. In an attempt to maintain the meaning and usefulness of the theory, scholars further explicated the second element to clarify that not anyone can engage in securitization but rather it is mainly practiced by those who have power and the ability to politically and socially label something a threat. As Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2014) emphasized, in order to become a securitizing actor, one should enjoy adequate political and social capital. To illustrate this point, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) mentioned ‘political leaders, bureaucrats, governments, lobbyists and pressure groups’ as the bodies that are generally deemed able to securitize.

In addition, for the purpose of preventing everything from becoming securitized, scholars shed light on three stages for the process of securitization. First, is the securitizing move where there should be an actor who identifies someone or something as an existential threat and exaggerates its presence in the view of a designated audience (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). In this regard, the main focus is on the ‘plot of securitization’ or ‘speech act’ through which the speaker educes his authority or social power to foster the credibility of his argument so that he/she can persuade the audience (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2014). Second, the speaker demands the embarkment on an emergency action as a solution to the issue (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Finally, results on inter-unit relations where the audience internalizes the threat, and thus, becomes convinced of breaking certain rules to eradicate the threat (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). The last stage is the one that determines the success or failure of the securitizing move. In explaining successful securitization, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) stated that its success fundamentally depends on the acceptance of the speech act by the referent object. Basically, if the audience does not accept the securitizing move, then the securitizing actor will fail in legitimizing the adoption of exceptional measures to eliminate that constructed threat. Besides this major and crucial requirement, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) shed light on three factors that lead to a successful securitization. They first mentioned that the claim of the actor must comply with the securitization process; they then underlined the importance of the power dynamics between the audience and the actor; and lastly, they conditioned that the formed threat should be plausible (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998).

### **2.3 Securitization Through Speech Acts**

As mentioned earlier, the speech act is a core prerequisite for securitization. By definition, a speech act is the linguistic construction of subjects or issues as a threat (Peoples, & Vaughan-Williams, 2014). Basically, it reflects how threats are discursively declared. Unlike other schools of thought on security, the CS, and especially Weaver, argues that securitization is rooted in language theory, highlighting that security can be regarded as a speech act. Waever (1993) explicitly stated that once the speaker utters 'security' a securitizing step is taken; therefore, the actor claims the right to seek any means that may counter it. The scholar means that a securitizing actor does not have to take concrete actions to securitize, but rather the securitizing move can be performed simply through the speech act. His argument stresses the discursively performative nature of this theory. In emphasizing the importance of speech acts, Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, (2014) asserted that the framing of an issue is the key stage that essentially impacts whether something or someone will be considered a threat or not. However, in this discourse, the speaker does not have to explicitly mention the specific terms 'security' or 'threat' as long as the frame conveys the meaning in a way that can be interpreted in this sense (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Particularly, this process entails presenting threats through a discourse that follows a "grammar of security" which alludes to "an existential threat, a point of no return, and a possible way out" (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998, p.33). The "point of no return" reflects the gravity of the threat, while the possible way out refers to the proposed solution of extreme actions against this issue.

After discussing the role and the significance of the speech act as a means to securitization and the essence of the theory, it is important to shed light on the

facilitating factors that strengthen the discourse and assists with the internalization of the threat. Besides the authority and credibility of the speaker, that was previously explained, the history and context of the speech are also vital to the acceptance of the alleged threat by the audience. As Huysmans (2006) noticed, the securitizing speech act builds upon a set of meanings that are constituted in history and institutionalized in society. Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2014) supported this argument by demonstrating that an already institutionalized discourse is easier to securitize compared to a new one. Additionally, in explaining the aspects that should get attention when looking at securitization, Balzacq (2015) included the context as one of the major elements. Linguistically, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) contend that the threat's characteristics are also a crucial factor of speech acts and that they differ from one sector to another.

As illuminated above, the main focus of securitization, according to the CS, is the speech act. However, this school converged and diverged with other groups such as the Paris School. The latter, in contrast to the CS, centered the focus of securitization on institutions' role rather than on the speech act. Its notable scholars such as Balzacq and Bigo criticized the approach of the CS in overemphasizing the speech act and ignoring the fact that security practices are primarily executed through policies (Balzacq, 2005). In other words, they claim that securitization is highly dependent on practice instead of discourse. Several authors also defend this logic by arguing that actions are possibly more important than discourses because words and speeches can be deliberately misleading to manipulate the referent object, whereas actions are unaltered firm acts that expose the real motives of the actor (Åtland & Ven Bruusgaard, 2009). Furthermore, other scholars partially disagreed on the CS definition of the security concept itself. For example, Maveilli (2013) did not

perceive security as limited to politics of exception or pertaining to the survival of the state and nation; but rather she stressed that security is also about risk management. In addition, as highlighted in the book of Boas (2015) that compared the major schools of security, both of the Risk and Critical Security schools rely on a positive view of securitization, while the CS perceives securitization in negative terms.

Against this background, the goal of this thesis is to simply draw on the CS as a concise paradigm for exploring how de/securitization is embodied in discourses and narratives, especially that this school is compatible with the aim of my thesis which concentrates on the speech act and rather analyzes negative securitization.

## **2.4 Securitization in the Context of Forced Migration**

One of the pioneers who linked security to migration is Buzan in 1991. He later collaborated with Wæver, Kelstrup, and Lemaitre to publish their book *Identity, Migration, and the New Security Agenda* in (1993) i.e. the beginning of the post-Cold War epoch. Their publication ties the principles of the Copenhagen School with the issues of migration wherein they analyzed migration, identity, and ethnic nationalism through security agenda. This work is one example among a large literature on the linkage between the two concepts. Most of which imply that securitization of forced migration shifted the international view on refugees from a humanitarian perspective to that of security. Basically, when we drop the securitization dimensions of the CS on migration, we understand that this phenomenon becomes presented as an existential threat in various sectors. This is especially more salient in the case of refugeeism where the host state has to respect more international treaties, laws, and principles that protect the universal rights of marginalized people. Due to such

additional obligations, the state feels a higher need to securitize so that it justifies the use of extreme measures that contradicts its commitments.

In fact, the securitization of migration is no novelty. As Hammerstad (2008) demonstrated, throughout history, refugees were highly deemed as potentially disruptive to the environment, economy, and culture; as they were also associated with transnational crimes or affiliated with international networks of terrorism. In this era, scholars agreed that the frequent portrayal of asylum seekers and migrants as suspicious security issues highly increased particularly since the attacks that erupted on September 11, 2001.

As seen earlier, much of the CS framework focuses on speech acts and highlights the importance of actors' authority to influence the audience for a successful securitization. In the case of migration, this is reflected in the high attention that the CS places on elites' discourses that represent migrants as a threat. In one chapter, Buzan (1993) adduces statements of French politicians connecting migration with security and the country's target to decrease claims of asylum at the borders. Todd Scribner (2017) joined the discussion to similarly explain the rhetoric and perspective of President Trump towards refugees. He showed that, generally, the Trump administration deals with migrants and refugees as a real threat to the national security of the U.S.A., and that asylum programs are a potential weakness of the country's borders (Scribner, 2017). While these scholars proved that politicians securitize refugees, Bigo (2002) chose to explicate the motives behind this securitization where he posited that elites construct certain truths concerning state security by attributing issues to migrants so that they buttress their political agenda. While the CS centers its attention mostly to the securitization embedded within elites' discourses, it is of particular importance to shed light on the role of the media

in contributing to this rhetoric. This is due to the powerful nature of this outlet as a mediator between politicians and communities. In fact, the press can be considered one of the very influential non-state actors that widely impacts security policy (Baum & Potter, 2008; Entman, 2004; Callaghan & Schnell, 2001). In the domain of migration, and as Venir (2015) stated, the media began to present a more negative coverage of forced migrants and further perceive them as a security threat. Similarly, Hoyer (2016) revealed that there is a tendency of creating the ‘we’ vs ‘them’ discursive construction in discourses that mention refugees. Such division reflects the ‘othering’ of refugees and exacerbates their perception as a threat. When refugees are represented as such in the media, public opinion towards them becomes characterized with resentment, and people begin to support any action that would evict them, which is after all the aim of securitization. Besides the framing of refugees as a security threat and the implications of those frames, d'Appollonia (2012) discussed the main reasons behind this depiction arguing that securitizing speech acts on migration are primarily a consequence of social, historical, and political constructions. This is compatible with the securitization framework that emphasized the context of the securitizing speech.

## **2.5 The Securitization of Forced Migration in the MENA Region**

The securitization of forced migrants was not exclusive merely to the West but was rather present even in the MENA region. At the policy level, Fakhoury (2019) mentioned that the construction of Arab governments’ refugee policies was determined by security politics and conflicts in the region. In Jordan, El-Abed (2014) revealed how Iraqi refugees were seen as a potential security risk instead of ‘guests’ when restrictions in the country were further tightened after the execution of Saddam Hussein in 2006, as well as the 2005 bombings that exploded three hotels in the

capital. Another study discussed the responses of Jordan, Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco to the incentives of EU foreign and security policies wherein it was revealed that security forces in Egypt often perceive refugees as potential security threats (Seeberg & Völkel, 2020). Moreover, Muzna al-Masri published a report that focuses on the securitization processes of the Syrian refugee case in Lebanon. In this publication, she explained how policy and discourses shifted towards the securitization of the refugee issue while highlighting efforts of Lebanese politicians and media outlets in framing and dealing with the Syrian forced migrants as a security threat (Al-Masri, 2015). Likewise, Weinthal, Zawahri, and Sowers (2015) contend that anxiety on the large arrival of Syrian refugees in Jordan triggered the portrayal of refugeeism as a security threat, which consequently allowed the government to proceed in securitization. Finally, the most investigated refugee case in the relevant literature was that of Palestinians. Czajka (2012), for example, looked at how Palestinian refugee camps were discursively represented as insecurity islands that can be penetrated by neither the Lebanese state nor its army, and in which the flourishing of extremist groups was allowed.

## **2.6 De-securitization**

As noted earlier, this thesis looks at the dual process of securitizing as well as de-securitizing forced migration. Against this backdrop, it is essential to understand how both processes have been conceptualized in relation to one another. Wæver, the scholar who theorized securitization, expressed critical views against the framing of subjects or problems as security issues. He perceived it as normatively undesirable and a negative practice (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). This scholar supported his perspective by claiming that securitization reflects a sense of failure in solving and dealing with an issue under the umbrella of normal politics; i.e. it necessitates

rule-breaking and the crafting of other emergency measures that consider national security as a priority over any other concern (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Furthermore, Avant (2007) touched on morality when criticizing securitization wherein they argued that it is ethically questionable as it intensifies sentiments of hostility and potential violence. On this basis, Wæver and several other scholars favor the de-securitization approach (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). This strategy has been introduced by the CS as a twin concept to securitization. It is explicated by Wæver as the process of reversing securitization, and through which issues are shifted from the ‘threat-defense’ mode into the ordinary political arena where regular politics apply (as cited in Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). In more specific terms, the CS defines de-securitization as language that is devoid of any security reference, or that suggests returning security issues to normal politics (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998).

Empirically, de-securitization attracted less attention from researchers in the field compared to the securitization theory (Watson, 2012; Wæver, 1995), especially beyond its normative features (Huysmans, 1998 a). This may be linked to the controversial nuanced definition of de-securitization. Indeed, as Floyd (2007) puts it, it is “largely under-theorized and open to interpretation” (p.330). Hansen (2012), for instance, emphasizes the aspect of de-securitization that focuses on taking something or someone out of security. One of the main points that Hansen (2012) covered is the ability of the public sphere in redefining the identities of the ‘other’ and the ‘self’. This has allowed for a wider range of different agents to engage in the process (Hansen, 2012). She further explained that de-securitization may necessitate that the friend-enemy dichotomy becomes loose to the extent of a complete transformation through which ‘the enemy’ deconstructs its identity (Hansen, 2012). Her logic was

influenced by Waever's perception of interrelations in politics. She mentioned how he thinks that de-securitization is in itself a process that shifts interrelatedness; as he elaborates, it alters who the Self and Other are, as well as what they are (Hansen, 2012). The second major point that Hansen (2012) sheds light upon is the consideration of 'choice' and 'responsibility' in decisions relevant to de-securitization. Floyd (2010), for example, paraphrased Waever in stressing his thought regarding our responsibility in securitizations and de-securitizations wherein he also calls for an ethical dedicated shape of agency. Waever believes that academics, citizens, politicians, and everyone who speak, must diligently reach de-securitization by working through security (Hansen, 2012).

In an attempt to further understand the construction of de-securitization, Hansen presented four variations of this process. These encompass 'change through stabilization' which involves moving away from a discourse that is openly centered on security while shifting toward a "less militaristic, less violent and hence more genuinely political form of engagement" (Hansen 2012, p. 539). An example of this would be *détente* during the Cold War. Another form is 'replacement' where a security issue is replaced with another one, hence pulling the real issue towards a de-securitized space (Hansen, 2012). This approach historically happened in 1999 after the US-led force when Turkey was securitized to Iraq while it got de-securitized with Iran and Syria (Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008). Hansen (2012) also mentioned 're-articulation' where someone explicitly offers to politically resolve the dangerous and threatening situation. The fourth variation is 'silencing' through which the issue disappears within security discourses (Hansen, 2012).

Other scholars that supported de-securitization claimed that it can simply emerge when we think about issues away from the enmity construction that exacerbates the

‘us’ vs ‘them’ division (Aradau, 2004; Huysmans, 1998 a). Additionally, in discussing de-securitization in relation to speech, Behnke (2006) was adamant that the mere engagement in security discourses, even with the intention of undermining them, can unconsciously bolster the connection between the issue and security. Based on this, he believes that de-securitization can solely happen from the absence of speech on this matter. Donnelly (2015), however, shares an opposing view. Instead, he argues that de-securitization can happen through speech, exemplifying this with a case analysis on the bilingual speech of Queen Elizabeth II that was addressed to her counterparts in Dublin, which might have been a contribution to a process of de-securitization.

## **2.7 De-securitization of Migration**

The very popular scholar who studied de-securitization in the context of migration is Jef Huysmans. He explained that by applying de-securitization to this case, the actor unmakes the construction of this phenomenon as an existential threat to a certain community (Huysmans, 1998 b). According to Huysmans, there are three strategies to de-securitize migration issues; these are the objectivist, constructivist, and de-constructivist ways. Huysmans clarified that the first one entails persuading people that a migrant is not actually a security threat (as cited in Roe, 2004). This is relevant to the idea of Judith Butler that conditioned for the process of de-securitization to be possible, that one “must instantiate the non-threatening identity of the Other” (as cited in Hansen, 2012, p.533). On the other hand, as per Huysmans, the constructivist method attempts to comprehend the securitization process instead of ascertaining whether something is a threat or not, and then can adopt this understanding to change the securitized frame (as cited in Roe, 2004). Lastly, Huysmans stated that the de-constructivist approach suggests that the story of a migrant should be told from

various contexts that do not replicate the ‘security drama’ but rather should be familiar to the day-to-day life of the native people (as cited in Roe, 2004). In doing so, the migrant is revealed as a person with many identities: mother/ father, woman/man, teacher/consumer/worker, etc; thereby, migrants’ collective identity is dismantled, and they are no longer perceived as a threat to the natives (as cited in Roe, 2004). Once this is achieved, the extraordinary measures become delegitimized.

## **2.8 Applying Securitization and De-securitization to my Case Study**

In order to achieve my thesis purpose, I will apply both theories to my case study. To that end, my research will first involve an analysis of the Lebanese media discourses that engage in the securitization and de-securitization of Syrian refugees. Taking into account that the CS stresses the crucial role of the speech act in the process, the focus of my thesis will be laid on the discursive processes of securitization and de-securitization to understand how the press linguistically shaped the securitizing move and the de-securitizing discourse. This aim will be achieved by identifying the structure, rhetorical and linguistic mechanisms, and statements that constructed the representation of Syrian refugees. As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework emphasizes the context of securitization. On this basis, and with the purpose of fully understanding the dynamics of this securitization, I will build on the historical experiences of Lebanon with various refugees.

With regards to de-securitization by refugees, building upon Hansen’s idea of expanding the range of agents that take part in the process, and Waever’s statement on responsibility and agency, this thesis will consider the attempt of Syrian refugees in becoming the actors that try to de-securitize themselves. Moreover, since the framework proved that this process can happen through speech, and as Huysmans stresses the importance of migrants’ stories in the de-constructivist strategy, I will

analyze the digital Syrian refugee narratives. Throughout my analysis, drawing on the thought of Aradau and Huysmans, I will search about whether refugees tried to deconstruct the 'us' vs 'them' construction through any device that reflects unity between Syrians and Lebanese. Additionally, I will explore whether they adopted the objectivist strategy through which they express themselves with counter-frames that debunk the threat image. Finally, I will also look for any de-constructivist attempts where refugees presented different identities through their stories. Indeed, all of these de-securitization techniques will also be applied the de-securitizing discourses of the press to see how the newspaper helped refugees in this process of de-securitization.

## **Chapter Three**

# **Literature Review: Securitization, Media, and Refugee Voices**

### **Section One**

#### **3.1 The Securitization of Refugees in Lebanon**

This chapter is split into two sections; the first one reviews previous literature on the securitization of refugees in Lebanon with a focus on policies and political discourses that address refugees prior and after the Syrian crisis. Considering that the theoretical framework sheds light on the context of securitization, this review will serve to contextualize the Syrian case in the framework of Lebanon. To that end, it will explain Lebanese politics and the securitizing attempts regarding other refugees to show the link of previous refugee situations with the current Syrian case. The second section surveys the securitization of Syrian refugees in worldwide media outlets as well as efforts that have been done to counter this issue. This will provide a background on how the core issue of media securitization regarding Syrian refugees is present in different countries throughout various periods.

Throughout history, Lebanon hosted a large number of refugees from different nationalities including Palestinians, Iraqis, and recently Syrians, among other minorities. However, this large forced migration was coupled with the deteriorating social, political, environmental, and economic situation of the country, which consequently hindered a smooth accommodation of these refugee populations. In addition to this context, the Lebanese state did not ratify the 1952 U.N. Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. This means that the government is not fully

obliged to protect refugees. Lebanon did not only refuse to sign this international convention, but it did not even craft a clear national legal framework for refugees. Indeed, many scholars address the issue of the opaque and ineffective Lebanese refugee system. Mencutek (2017) criticized the lack of efforts and policies from the Lebanese state and labeled it as ‘policy paralysis’. Fakhoury (2017) also argued that the Lebanese government was not effectively mobilized during the refugee crisis, shedding light on its dysfunctionality and weakness in constructing policy response. Against this background, Dionigi (2016) talked about the open border policy that Lebanon enacted for Syrians prior to 2015. As this author mentioned, during that period, the flow of goods and circular migration between Syria and Lebanon was highly encouraged, illustrating a “thin” border between the two countries (Dionigi, 2016). In other words, everything was made very flexible to bridge the bilateral interests of both countries. Yet Mourad (2017) criticized this inaction asserting that it was not a clear open border policy- as it seems- but merely an overall absence of policy that negatively affected the current refugee case in Lebanon. Loescher and Milner (2005) joined the discussion by claiming that states that meet a large arrival of forced migrants with inadequate policy options are likely to frame refugees as a security threat to legitimize acts that are otherwise not allowed. Basically, policy gaps may assist in the securitization process. Along the same lines, Nassar and Stel (2019) tackled the ambiguity in the system, contending that it is deliberately kept as such so that actors would be able to engage in informal practices against Syrian refugees, which in turn, leads to their securitization. This thought is compatible with the argument of Estriani (2018) who affirms the heterogeneous political decisions throughout Lebanon, highlighting the arbitrary unilateral actions of municipalities, which were evident in the well-known example of curfews. In supporting the same

logic, Mourad (2017) provided evidence that there were 142 Lebanese municipalities implementing curfews for Syrians. Indeed, the Lebanese government itself is quite open about its non-commitment to concrete laws that would regulate the forced migration in the country. As Beaujouan (2018) stated, in 2015 the state explicitly announced that the Syrian crisis was controlled by governmental decisions instead of law. Clearly, the government is adamant that it perpetuates this ambiguous governance and the absence of policies.

This issue may also be linked to disagreements on policymaking. According to Şahin Mencutek (2017), the political elites in Lebanon are not very committed to forming policies that all parties would agree upon. This correlates with Geha and Talhouk (2019) statement wherein they mentioned that a lack of consent on policy issues is predicted in a government that is characterized by power-sharing based on sects. Besides sectarianism, Lebanese politicians hold polarized political stances regarding the Syrian refugee case. This has resulted from the interferences of Lebanon in the Syrian war and vice versa. Regarding the first, Berti and Schweitzer (2013) disclosed that the Lebanese political party, Hezbollah, was providing the al-Assad regime with significant political and military capital in a form of support. As for the second, Geha and Talhouk (2018) testified upon Syria's role in the Lebanese civil war, the tutelage that it had over Lebanon between 1990 till 2005, and its accusation of the assassination of important Lebanese politicians. All of these events shaped the polarized Lebanese political spectrum regarding Syria. Taking this into consideration, the state might prefer to maintain a no-policy policy as a means to realize neutrality in its divided context.

Back to the sectarian issue, which does not only obstruct policy making but also directly affects the Syrian case, Geha and Talhouk (2018) explicated that receiving

mostly Sunni Syrian refugees in Lebanon is very politicized as they are considered an existential threat to Christians and a security issue to Shiites. In fact, the issue of belief in the context of refugees in Lebanon has been always present. As Czajka (2012) attest, after the civil war of Lebanon, there was a highly securitizing and politicized discourse on Palestinian refugees, through which they perceived them as agents that destabilize the confessional system of the country which struggled to achieve balance between Muslims and Christians.

With regards to the status of refugees in Lebanon, i.e. the one that is recognized by the UN, Chabaan et al. (2013) explained that it does not have much legal effect in the Lebanese government; hence, the majority of Syrian refugees become treated as illegals and prone to arrests. In other words, leaving refugees with a precarious status deprives them of their rights and facilitates their securitization. When refugees are not considered in need of humanitarian aid but rather migrants who access the country illegally, the Lebanese state may legitimize their arrest. Basically, this government does not set laws for refugees but still treats them as unlawful. In the same vein of the unclear refugee status that leads to manipulation, Czajka (2012) posits that, historically, Palestinian refugees were discursively constructed as guests in Lebanon. This is a strategy that governments adopt to exclude themselves from the obligations that come with this term, considering that it reflects a legal status that imposes on the host state the responsibility of providing protection to those who sought refuge.

Adding on, Mourad (2017) criticized the non-encampment inaction of the government in the Syrian case. This means that the state refused to adopt a policy that would allow the formal construction of shelters or the creation of recognized refugee camps for Syrians (Mourad, 2017). The reason behind this decision is the

perception of refugees as a security threat that can evolve within camps. As Mourad (2017) clarified, this inaction is related to the pre-established fears that were engendered from the perceived negative experience of Lebanon with Palestinian refugees. Truly, in the past, the Cairo Agreement gave Palestinian refugees autonomy in the administration of the camps (Halabi, 2004). However, Czajka (2012) revealed that these camps were discursively framed by political elites as safe havens for militias and as complex sites for the smuggling of weapons. Furthermore, they were constructed by the same actors as a state-within-a-state (Czajka, 2012) in a sense that they form a threat to the sovereignty of the country. Consequently, these discourses spread resentment and anxiety in the public against Palestinian refugees and their camps, transferring their cause to an issue. Halabi (2004) further stated that these concerns, especially after repealing the agreement, have resulted in calls for the denial of Palestinian refugee rights, both civically and politically. Indeed, these refugees were not granted work permits and were also banned from many jobs, among other discriminating decisions that were justified by the aforementioned risks (Halabi, 2004). An additional important factor behind this treatment of Palestinian refugees is the fear of settlement (*tawteen*), which is a salient topic in discussions on refugees. As Czaika (2012) argued, state discourses on the civil, economic, and political rights of Palestinian refugees were often interwoven with the subject of Palestinians' settlement in Lebanon. Although Palestinians' willingness for repatriation was highly expressed, discourses of the Lebanese political elite often voiced their fears on the naivety and untrustworthiness of this Palestinian claim (Czaika, 2012).

The abovementioned case of Palestinians is an evident example of the securitization of refugees in Lebanon prior to the Syrian crisis. It clearly highlights the power of

elite discourses in constructing Palestinians as a security issue and justifying decisions that deprive them of several rights. Likewise, the securitization of the current Syrian refugees has also been activated by politicians' speech acts. As Estriani (2018) posits, Lebanese elites perceived refugees as existential threats that would destabilize the country and used them as scapegoats for the different issues of Lebanon. This author adduced her point with the statement of the Lebanese foreign minister that deemed Syrian refugees an existential threat to the security of Lebanon, assuming that their presence implied potential rebels and the formation of militant groups (Estriani, 2018). Furthermore, Atallah and Mahdi (2017) demonstrated that it was the discourse of the majority Lebanese parties that realized a shared view and presumption on the image of refugees as factors that burden the economy and the infrastructure of Lebanon.

In addition, it is important to mention the reason that made securitization blatant in the discourses of Lebanese politicians. This is what Fakhoury (2017) explained as the instrumentalization of the issue for political ends. As she illustrated, political parties and elites that securitized Syrian refugees, under the rationale of ensuring a demographic balance, were actually instrumentalizing the matter so that they reinforce their status as politicians who defend the rights of minorities and Christians in Lebanon (Fakhoury, 2017). Basically, the factors behind the securitizing move do include the motives of politicians as well.

Reflecting on all that has been discussed, the case of former refugees (Palestinians) impacted current decisions on recent refugees (Syrians). This has been emphasized by some scholars such as Salloukh (2017) who contends that the Palestinian experience has influenced the way current Syrian refugees are treated. From this we can infer that securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is closely linked to

historical incidents with former refugees. This follows the approach of situating the securitizing efforts in the historical context, which is a significant aspect that was highly stressed in the theoretical framework of Chapter One. Finally, it is of particular importance to assert that those political elites' discourses were buttressed by other Lebanese actors such as some media outlets. This point will be discussed in detail throughout the case study chapter.

Indeed, there is an agreement among scholars and analysts that Lebanon's media securitized Syrian refugees and reflected politicians' speech acts. For instance, El-Behairy (2016) demonstrated that Lebanese newspapers framed Syrian refugees as a threat. Abid, Manan, & Rahman (2017) also revealed how Lebanese media relied on metaphors to dehumanize Syrian refugees. In addition, Alsridi and Ziani (2019) proved how Syrian refugees are portrayed as risk factors especially to the economic and security level. Of course, these are a few examples among a large pool of negative frames which will be further explained in chapter four.

## **Section Two**

### **3.2 The Media Misrepresentations of Syrian Refugees Worldwide**

Prior to investigating the specific case of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese media, it is important to establish a background about media representations of Syrian refugees across the world. Given that the literature on the Lebanese media portrayals is narrow, this section will broaden the explanation of media approaches that may be useful in discussing my data. In other words, this section will deliver a background on the different strategies and frames that are used by the media when representing Syrian refugees. This is important as it provides an adequate understanding of these frames and approaches, knowing that some of them were not identified or explained

in the literature on the Lebanese media. Additionally, since the literature review provides a backdrop for making sense of my findings, this section will provide in this regard the necessary background information that I will build on to discuss the frames and strategies that the Lebanese media have used to securitize refugees.

Although some research on this topic highlighted a number of positive frames, the rest of the findings were generally negative. In the analysis of distorting discourses, most scholars agreed that Syrian refugees were widely represented as a threat to the various aspects of receiving countries; thus, implying the securitization of refugees in the media. One of the very common types of this threat are security and terrorism.

Alaminos-Fernández (2018) illuminated that, in the security frame, topics that shape the content of the news associate refugees with crimes, violence, border controls, and other relevant issues. He further clarified that in order to illustrate this kind of news, journalists may showcase pictures of cuffed individuals, violent cases, or fights, as were shown in the case of the Hungarian media coverage (Alaminos-Fernández, 2018). Additionally, they may ascribe other immoral and illegal behaviors to refugees. Kamenova (2014) exemplified this point with a quote from a Bulgarian newspaper that says, "Because of the many refugees who have neither job nor money, supermarket employees in the area of Women's Market are crying out from thieves" (p.180). Basically, through exaggerated terms and an argument about the alleged reasons that push Syrian refugees to steal, journalists created a persuading method to strengthen their claim, and hence, monger fear within the public towards refugees. This public anxiety, in turn, would facilitate the acceptance of any state actions that would target Syrian refugees. As Rheindorf and Wodak (2018) argued, this frame is mainly utilized as a means to legitimize the adoption of extraordinary

measures intended to handle them, which is one of the major aims of the securitizing discourse.

Regarding the terrorism frame, Ghazal (2019), who studied the portrayal of Syrian refugees in the American media, sheds light on the way these refugees were constructed as potential terrorists who have the intention of causing extreme violence for the sake of their political, ideological, or religious objectives. Since most Syrians embrace a religion that is different from the dominant one in the West, and due to some of their conflicting ideologies and political views, considering the background of the civil war, this perception is easier to internalize. Ghazal (2019) elucidated this frame with the coverage of an American newspaper that attributed the November 2015 Paris attacks to a Syrian refugee who accessed Europe with a Syrian passport. When discussing this case, she stressed the fact that although evidence proved the European citizenship of the perpetrators, the media did not clarify or correct its accusation of the Syrian refugee in its post-publications (Ghazal, 2019). Because of the circulation of such stories at first, and keeping the claims uncorrected afterward, the media reinforces the image of Syrians as terrorists regardless of the facts. This picture not only affirms the alleged threats, but it also detaches the human aspects of refugees. As Medianu (2014) proved with his findings, when people are exposed to editorials that depict refugees as terrorists, the automatic dehumanization of refugees gets activated. Thereby, the state can justify the adoption of inhumane policies.

The literature also showed that Syrian refugees are commonly represented as the reason behind the economic instability of destination countries. Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) categorized this frame in two forms; either the financial burden or the financial threat. They explained that the former is mostly linked to the governmental assistance granted to refugees, whereas the latter is more focused on competition for

jobs (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). In other words, when refugees seek assistance from the government to meet their financial needs, the media depicts them as economic dependents who take advantage of the host country. Yet even when refugees become self-reliant and get employed, they are still criticized by the media under the repeated rationale of “stealing jobs.” Abid, Manan, and Rahman (2017) testified upon the description of Syrian refugees as an economic burden by adducing the citation of *The Jordan Times*, a newspaper based in Jordan, which once explicitly published ‘Refugees *burden* Jordan’s economy’ (p. 134). In their research, they explicated that the word ‘burden’ is a metaphor in this context (Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017). This indicates the undesirable presence of refugees through a metaphorical allegation that implies the negative implications of the Syrian forced migration on the Jordanian economic sector.

Another type of misrepresentation is linking Syrian refugees to dangerous diseases. This was demonstrated by Venir (2016) who showed how the *Mirror*, a British newspaper, warned of the expected threat of Syrians who might bring polio to Europe. To summarize, the securitizing discourse of the global media was shaped by the depiction of Syrian refugees as a threat to societal and national security, as well as to the economic and health sectors, all of which are very critical points for the country and its people. However, logically speaking, many people would not immediately and easily perceive refugees as a threat. Based on this, the securitization in the media is emphasized with other negative representations and strategies.

One of these representations is depicting Syrian refugees as a political tool. In this respect, Ghazal (2019) revealed that most of the Syrian refugee coverage in the *New York Times* was contextualized in the U.S. presidential elections. This author further asserts that this approach dehumanizes Syrian refugees (Ghazal, 2019). Some

scholars dedicated research specifically to this matter of refugee dehumanization. In studying its ramifications, Müller and Schwarz (2018) suggest that the Facebook anti-immigrant posts, that dehumanize immigrants, predict hostile crimes committed against refugees in areas whose population highly uses social media. Likewise, another research claimed that dehumanization can result in public's resentment and negative views towards refugees (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Indeed, the exacerbation of public anxiety against refugees is a crucial factor for a successful securitization. Other scholars contributed to this issue by explaining how the formation of the "we" vs "them" narratives may reinforce those dehumanization implications (Hoyer, 2016). In fact, this is also one of the methods used in securitization (Aradau, 2004). It happens by creating a division as if the "we" signifies the humans, the people; whereas the "them" implies the new phenomenon that threatens the country. Jayanathan and Pedersen (2018) elaborated on this idea by arguing that, when reproducing such a discourse, the news media bolster what is called 'mental bordering' between the refugee community and the host nation, which intensifies negative stereotypes on newcomers (Jayanathan & Pedersen, 2018). Similarly, Mihelj (2004) claimed that such discourse contributes to the perpetuation of the negative frames associated with refugees as well as impedes their integration. Moreover, Dellas (2018) joined the discussion on 'othering' by showing how this issue of discursive division is not only created through textual strategies, but it is also visualized. He illustrated his claim by mentioning the images of Syrian refugees behind barriers in the content of the *New York Times* (Dellas, 2018). In problematizing the pictured divisions, Fair and Parks (2001) argued that such portrayals expand the cultural and physical space that separates the audience from refugees. Linking this strategy to securitization, Bradimore and Bauder (2012)

contend that the ‘othering’ of refugees helps in justifying the interventionist actions of the government.

From this review, we can infer that while foreign media diversified its frames and strategies in depicting Syrian refugees, most of them are either explicitly or implicitly related to the reinforcement of securitization attempts.

### **3.3 The Refugee Voice and Counter-Narratives**

The securitization of Syrian refugees is coupled with the absence of the refugee voice in the mainstream media. Indeed, refugees were given very few chances to directly speak about their experiences. Many scholars have revealed this issue in the media discourse of various countries. For instance, Hoyer (2016) disclosed the lack of the Syrian refugee voice in Spain, Ghazal (2019) highlighted this issue in the U.S., and Toker (2019) uncovered this problem in Turkey and Norway. Basically, it is only the media and political figures that have the power and space to represent refugees; whereas refugees themselves, whose perspective is very important as they are the concerned people, have been denied their right to speech in these powerful arenas. In this regard, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) explained that this hierarchy of voices can result in the misrecognition of refugees as social, historical, and political agents. Besides the hierarchy, the absence of the refugee voice, in itself, leads to other terrible implications. Hoyer (2016), for instance, showed that the lack of the refugee view perpetuates the dehumanization and objectification of refugees. As seen above, these consequences support the securitizing move.

Interestingly, some people are aware of this issue and have already taken actions to counter media misrepresentations of Syrian refugees as well as to provide a platform for the refugee voice. In illustrating the initiatives that attempt to debunk the

misconceptions on refugees, Jayanathan and Pedersen (2018) mentioned that the UNHCR offers guidelines on how to interview forced migrants as well as the appropriate terminology that should be used in this context. In the same vein, Kamenova (2014) provided the example of the European association of journalists in Bulgaria that organized a roundtable for the portrayal of Syrian refugees in the media and the strategies that help in writing and delivering the subject while taking responsibility into account.

Some scholars highlighted other initiatives that tackled media misrepresentations by providing a space to the Syrian refugee voice. For example, Hout (2019) mentioned that Humans of New York, which is a famous blog launched in the U.S., created two series that were dedicated to the pictures and stories of Syrian forced migrants. Through this digital arena, refugees could convey their voices in a huge platform that reaches people in different countries. In Jordan, Kuttab (2017) highlighted the Jordanian community media that trained more than 100 Syrians who became part of the daily radio program “Syrians Among Us”. He explained that it was launched to empower Syrians and challenge the hate speech of the local media (Kuttab, 2017). To that end, this program produced live reports by a Syrian field reporter in the camp of Zaatari (Kuttab, 2017), thus, showcasing the exact reality. Kuttab (2017) also sheds light on the investigation unit of this project that disclosed issues of compulsory deportations, corruption, and the seizure of Syrians’ official documents. Thereby, this initiative successfully served the purpose of conveying the different perspectives of Syrian refugees as well as underlined their agency in practicing journalism to advocate for their rights. Adding on, Ghazal (2019) noted that, constructing counter-narratives by Syrian refugees in such platforms would be useful in achieving higher objectivity.

The literature also presented studies that predict refugees' reactions to media misrepresentations. Indeed, refugees are aware of their picture in the media. As Kamenova (2014) said, the 'other' often comes across the image created about him in the media; thus, he is conscious about stereotypes attributed to him. This is called the stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999), which results in three kinds of reactions (Snyder & Klein, 2005). The 'other' may compensate the stereotype by presenting a totally different image of his individual self from that of the stereotype, or he may change the stereotype by sharing a different image of his group (Snyder & Klein, 2005). Surprisingly, he can also accept and enact the stereotype and even behave in a manner consistent with it (Snyder & Klein, 2005).

In order to discover which type of image refugees embraced, some scholars interviewed and then analyzed the narratives of refugees; others conducted an analysis of the already shared self-representations of refugees. Witteborn (2008) published a study in the context of identity wherein he explained how Iraqi refugees in the U.S. downplayed the refugee identity and rather positioned themselves as people who are grounded on the national pan-Arab identity. In addition, and as part of the previously mentioned initiative of Humans of New York, Hout (2019) revealed that the stories shared by Syrian refugees mostly revolved around their experiences of fleeing from the Assad regime, ISIS, and/or the insurgents till their resettlement in America. Finally, Nikunen, (2019) researched how former refugees in Finland supported other fellow refugees by engaging in a campaign through which they relied on selfie-activism and their job titles in introducing themselves. According to this scholar, through this campaign, refugees challenged the image of the 'threat' by framing themselves as good citizens who contribute to the country with their professions and their expressed loyalty (Nikunen, 2019).

The aforementioned cases are a few relevant studies; however, research on this topic is still scarce. Therefore, my thesis will contribute to broadening the literature on this subject by presenting and discussing data of how Syrian refugees frame their own narratives in response to media misrepresentations, specifically to the securitizing discursive attempts.

## **Chapter Four**

# **The Securitization of Syrian Refugees in the Lebanese Media**

### **4.1 The Securitization of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon's Politics**

Applying the securitization theory to the refugee subject, O'Driscoll (2017) explained that media and political discourses construct refugees as an existential threat to the host country, which as a consequence, results in more rigorous policies that deflect from the international refugee law. In this sense, and unlike its previous policies, Lebanon has adopted some strict measures to address the Syrian refugee case. At the beginning of the crisis, Lebanon had an open border policy for Syrians (Dionigi, 2016). However, 2014 marked the first major shift of decisions when Lebanon decided to apply a new residency policy that strives for the closure of borders and the regulation of Syrians' presence in the country (Saraya, 2019). Precisely, in October 2014, the Lebanese government implemented a policy that aimed at reducing the number of Syrians by halting the influx of more refugees and encouraging those already in Lebanon to return to Syria or move to other countries (UNHCR, 2015). In order to do so, the government halted the UNHCR registration of refugees in 2015 (Human Rights Watch, 2019 a). Since then, restrictive measures have been increasingly adopted to curb Syrian refugees' mobility, employment and livelihoods. In November 2018, the general security launched campaigns to crack down on informal businesses that were owned or ran by Syrians in various places in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch, 2019 a). In January 2019, those campaigns attained even larger momentum (International Crisis Group, 2020), and the pressure on Syrian

refugees continued to increase. It was in early 2019 that shelter demolitions began to happen as well (Human Rights Watch, 2019 a). With regard to deportations, Lebanon has highly abstained from deporting Syrians and rather stayed committed to the principle of non-refoulment (International Crisis Group, 2020). However, in spring 2019, it began to take actions that violated its commitment (International Crisis Group, 2020). For instance, on May 13th, 2019, the General Director of the General Security decided to deport every Syrian who illegally come to Lebanon after April 24, 2019 (Human Rights Watch, 2019 b). Indeed, these were merely the national policies. As shown in the literature review, municipalities also embarked on informal practices including the implementation of several curfews (Estriani, 2018). Referring back to the definition of O’Driscoll, we can infer that the Lebanese media played an important role in highlighting and in some cases supporting these restrictions. This inference will be further discussed in the below titles.

## **4.2 The Media-politics Nexus**

In most countries, journalists are expected to respect media ethics and the law. To begin with the former, the Lebanese Press Syndicate published several principles among which are the following: “The newspaper should be committed to truth, honesty, accuracy, and the principle of not disclosing sources” as well as it should respect “the reputation of the individual and preserves his dignity” (Nordenstreng & Topuz, 1989, p.174). Additionally, according to Article 3 in the code of ethics that the Lebanese media adopted in 2013, the signatories should condemn racism and refrain from insulting people’s dignity (Abou-Zahr, 2017).

As for the latter, Lebanon enacted the 1962 Press law, which was last revised in 1995, to formally organize the press. This law criminalizes false news and the

provocation of crimes (Sciacchitano, 2015), as well as it forbids any publication that violates the morals and ethics of the public (Media Law International, 2016).

Moreover, the Publication Law prohibits any publication that incites racist or confessional disputes (ILA, 2015). Although there are several rules that regulate media content, even beyond what has been mentioned above, many discriminatory representations in the Lebanese media are not practically prosecuted or censored. This is especially true in depictions of some ethnic ‘weak’ or minority groups. As Dabbous-Sensenig stated, in these cases, even the explicitly racist representations were not censored (as cited in Sciacchitano, 2015).

With regards to media ownership, the law does not include legal provisions that prevent members of the parliament and ministers of the government or their families from owning shares in the outlet (MOM, 2018 b). Furthermore, there is no obligation that force them to state their political affiliations (MOM, 2018 b). On this basis, political and familial ownership became prevalent in Lebanese media platforms. Some of those owners were first active in the media arena and then accessed politics, others began as politicians and later invested in the media sector (MOM, 2018 b). To exemplify this political ownership, MOM (2018 b) mentions the case of *Annahar* which was owned by Nayla Tuani (former MP), Saad Hariri (former prime minister of Lebanon), and Marwan Hamade (former minister of education).

Since Lebanese media owners are politically affiliated, their political views definitely reflect on some content of their outlet. As demonstrated by Cozma and Kozman (2018), the bias of the Lebanese press is compatible with its partisan ownership. Similarly, Freedom House points out that the political opinions of outlet owners are generally mirrored on the published news content (as cited in Cozma & Kozman, 2018). Likewise, a study by Maharat Foundation (2016) revealed that the Lebanese

media coverage of Syrian refugees is mainly influenced by political positions. In the same vein, Saraya (2019) stated that, due to connections between media outlets and politicians, the media in Lebanon has served the securitization of Syrian refugees and contributed to the propagation of xenophobia and hate within the public. However, there are definitely some exceptions to this background based on the kind of topic discussed.

### **4.3 The Representations of Syrian Refugees in the Lebanese Media**

Generally speaking, the Lebanese media contributed to framing refugees as security threats, replicating in various ways politicians' statements and speech acts.

According to El-Behairy (2016), the two biggest newspapers in Lebanon routinely mentioned Syrian refugees as a threat. The threat types adopted by this media are similar to those that were utilized in the foreign media. To begin with the terrorism frame, a UNDP (2015) study, that monitored racism in many Lebanese media outlets, showed how Syrian refugees have been labeled as ambulant bombs, army killers, and potential ISIS fighters. The public knows that since Syria is a country that borders Lebanon and suffers from terrorism, there are higher expectations that the terrorist risk may reach Lebanon. Thus, when the media depicts the people who come from Syria as terrorists, it builds on some preexistent fearful assumptions that support this media rhetoric, and which makes the frame stronger for a successful securitization.

Syrian refugees have also been deemed a burden to the country. To illustrate, a Lebanese newspaper metaphorically posted, 'Lebanon is buckling under the weight of these refugees' (as cited in Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017, p. 134). In supporting the same argument, another study found that the Lebanese press concentrated mainly on the burden of asylum and security issues (UNDP, 2015). This is not to deny some of the negative implications resulted from the Syrian forced migration in Lebanon,

but rather to highlight the point that the Lebanese media does not create balance in its discourse regarding refugees, knowing that while it presents their negative effects, it ignores their positive contributions. For example, it has been mentioned that, very few people were aware that in 2016, Syrian refugees have paid \$378 million for rent to local landlords, and between 2011 and 2014, 84% of newly opened businesses surrounding refugee settlements belonged to Lebanese citizens who profited financially from the presence of Syrians in the area; all of this is in addition to the \$22 million that was monthly spent by Syrians on food in local shops and stores (Abou-Zahr, 2017). Basically, Syrian refugees do contribute positively to Lebanon, and there is enough evidence on this subject; however, the Lebanese media chooses not to incorporate this aspect in its coverage on Syrian refugees. Presenting such an unbalanced discourse implies that Syrian refugees are merely a negative factor that affects the capacities of Lebanon, and so, they should be resettled or deported.

In addition, the media in Lebanon portrayed Syrian refugees as an economic threat. This frame is one of the very common frames utilized in this media. According to an analysis of Lebanese news websites, it has been demonstrated that, the economic risk ranked the second most presented risk that was expected from Syrian refugees (Alsriddi & Ziani, 2019). Moreover, TV anchors have included biased stories that accused Syrians of stealing jobs (Abou-Zahr, 2017). These anchors did not only present these stories, but they also identified themselves as potential victims of this risk. For instance, in a live talk show, a well-known Lebanese anchorwoman once said, "They are everywhere... Who knows, maybe someday I will get fired and one of them will take my place" (as cited in Abou-Zahr, 2017). This sentence clearly accused Syrian refugees of taking the available jobs. Whereas, research has revealed that Syrian refugees are affected by high unemployment rates as well (Masri &

Srouf, 2014). This means that unemployment is an issue affecting both groups and that blaming refugees is more of a strategy to justify the government's failure in solving it. As Bassem Chit and Mohamad Ali Nayel contend, this "blame" diverts attention from old structural issues in Lebanon that were present long before the arrival of refugees (as cited in Qubaia & Gagné, 2014). This is related to the evidence of scapegoating that was mentioned in the literature review.

The security risk, which is the fundamental threat type of securitization, has also been used by the Lebanese media in its discourse about Syrian refugees. This is reflected in the results of the UNDP (2015) study which indicated that arrests and security procedures were the first common topic of the major coverages pertaining to Syrian issues in the print media. An additional study that stresses the wide prevalence of this specific frame noted that security was the main issue that the "Ya-Sour" website chose to deal with regarding Syrian refugees (Alsrudi & Ziani, 2019). Furthermore, the Lebanese print and audiovisual media dedicated more time to framing Syrian refugees as criminals who are involved in violent acts such as attacks and drug trafficking ("the fear," 2017). This frame is very critical as it adversely affects Syrian refugees. According to Saraya (2019), this media rhetoric effectively alienated Syrian refugees who are already kept in the margins of the community. Besides marginalization, refugees' personal security also became at risk due to the hostility that grew against them which was illustrated in social media posts that promoted violence towards them and rallies that called for their eviction (Saraya, 2019).

The security-threat type also takes a gender approach and becomes associated with Syrian refugee men portrayed as rapists. It has been indicated that, around the end of 2013 and 2014, several stories in the Lebanese media rapidly ignited the alleged rape,

harassment, and sexual violence committed by Syrian refugee men (Qubaia & Gagné, 2014). More importantly, some of these cases were later proved to be rumors; however, the media did not clarify, address, or correct those stories (Qubaia & Gagné, 2014). This made Syrian men in Lebanon labeled as rapists even when they were not. As Maya Mikdashi asserts, regardless of accuracy, the alleged sexual violence in these stories yields sexual and moral panics, as well as they may provoke exaggerated reactions from Lebanese citizens and security forces (as cited in Qubaia & Gagné, 2014).

Besides the aforementioned threat types that have been discussed, some other threatening frames have been documented in the literature discussing the Lebanese media representations of Syrian refugees. These include framing refugees as a demographic, cultural (Alsriddi & Ziani, 2019), social (UNDP, 2015), and environmental threat to the country. To provide an example on the last frame, Abou-Zahr (2017) reported that, a prominent Lebanese newspaper deemed refugees as the reason behind air pollution in Lebanon.

As has been clarified in the literature review, there are other strategies and negative representations that emphasize the securitizing discourse while they implicitly strengthen the threat frames. An example of these media discursive strategies is the use of the superlative, as in writing “we fear the worst” or “the biggest problem Lebanon faces is Syrian displacement” (UNDP, 2015, p. 28). This approach shapes the Syrian forced migration as a case that yields an unprecedented level of dire consequences; thereby, it augments the scope of concerns against Syrian refugees.

Another method that has been used in the description of Syrian refugees is the dehumanization. It has been shown that this approach justifies hostile behaviors and policies (Warnock, 2019) since it situates borders, instead of humans, at the core of

political solutions (Smets et al., 2019). As Rheindorf and Wodak further explicated, this strategy triggers securitization, moralization, and border militarization (as cited in Smets et al., 2019). The dehumanization in the Lebanese media discourse has been done through, first, quantifying refugees as masses and limiting their individuality to mere numbers (Turbay, 2015). Second, presenting them as faceless people whose pictures are seldom included in discussions about them (Dellas, 2018). Third, depicting them with water and war metaphors. As an illustration of this specific depictions, Ya Libnan once shared ‘The biggest wave of refugees flowing into the smallest of Syria’s neighbors’ (as cited in Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017, p.128). Basically, people seeking refuge and peace are represented as a wave, a natural hazard, by the media of the receiving country. Similarly, As-Safir, a Lebanese press wrote: “Even the Syrians themselves have caught wind of an incomprehensible Lebanese reluctance to defuse the ticking bomb of displacement!” (as cited in UNDP, 2015, p.33). Likewise, a humanitarian displacement is described as a war weapon, another dangerous metaphor. Evidently, these descriptions are a serious issue to the image of refugees. According to Mayr, the use of metaphors engender fear in the receiving community who then further considers refugees as a risk to their countries (as cited in Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017). In fact, the power of metaphors is immensely significant as these devices are prevalent in everyday life that encompasses not only language but also our actions and thoughts, knowing that the latter are essentially metaphorical in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). All of these highlight the significance of word choice, which can immensely impact public opinion and policies.

The media further misrepresents refugees while it tries to legitimize its hatred discourse. Taking into account that refugees should be welcomed and protected from

a humanitarian perspective, the Lebanese media implicitly justifies its hate through framing Syrian refugees as bogus who, therefore, deserve those depictions. For example, research on this issue revealed that in the qualities used by news websites for refugees, it has been shown that the term “illegal” ranked the first common quality used by Ya-sour for Syrian refugees (Alsridi & Ziani, 2019). Likewise, another study mentioned that Syrian refugees were portrayed as people who possess fake entry cards (UNDP, 2015). This frame is also supported by the decontextualization of refugees. According to a dissertation that was conducted on the visual framing of Syrian refugees in a Lebanese press, it has been found that the individual stories of refugees about the historical and political conditions back home were widely ignored in its news pictures (Dellas, 2018). The same study also explained that this print media outlet visualized neither the actual conflict in Syria, which pushed these refugees to leave their country, nor the deaths that happened throughout their journeys (Dellas, 2018). When the audience is notified about the large presence of refugees but left uninformed about the danger that led them to escape, the public might trivialize the urgency of the catastrophe and the hazards that drove refugees to flee (Dellas, 2018). As a consequence, refugees could be named migrants (Alaminos-Fernández, 2018), which is another type of migration that is conversely voluntary, and thus, they become treated accordingly. For instance, it has been published that, expulsions of Syrians from Lebanese towns and the late refugee deportations to Syria, were partially justified by the difficulty in making a distinction between refugees and economic migrants or migrant workers (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Karam, 2018). In addition, Janmyr and Mourad (2018) mentioned that, administrative procedures in Lebanon efficiently performed to consider Syrians as

economic migrants rather than ‘refugees’. That’s why it is problematic when the reasons behind Syrian refugeeism are neglected.

While in some cases the Lebanese media tried to hide its hatred and racism or legitimize them, it was sometimes explicitly and openly racist in its discourse on Syrian refugees. In illustrating this point, Abou-Zahr (2017) uncovered a headline in a prominent Lebanese press that was criticized for publishing a report that described how Hamra Street was overrun with ‘dark-skinned Syrians’. Besides the immorality of racism, such discourse negatively affects refugees’ status and civil rights (UNDP, 2015).

In summary, the Lebanese media diversified its negative frames and techniques regarding its misrepresentations of Syrian refugees. This rhetoric cannot be situated in a vacuum. It is to be linked to the securitization that was engendered and deployed by politicians through speech acts. Still, as my findings will show later, the discursive securitization of refugees has not been monolithic. While print media indeed channeled politicians’ securitized portrayals, it also debunked in some cases these portrayals, offering a more complex insight into the process of discursive securitization.

#### **4.4 Syrian Refugee voices in Lebanon**

Prior to analyzing the stories of Syrian refugees, it is important to have a glimpse on where such narratives are shared and accessed by the Lebanese public. To that end, this section mentions the efforts and initiatives that provided platforms and encouraged the spread of refugee voices. To begin with, there are a few storytelling projects in Lebanon, such as Hakaya storytelling and Cliffhangers, that gave the mic to Syrian refugees, and through which, they shared their thoughts, messages, and

stories. The Haneen exhibition is also a relevant example as it displayed the art of Lebanese and Syrian artists along with the stories of Syrian refugee children. Interestingly, some of these narratives strove to debunk media misrepresentations as was in the work of a Syrian child who sought to deconstruct the quantification of refugees' identity. Finally, it is of a particular interest to introduce Campji, a refugee newsroom for refugee stories by refugees in Lebanon which strives to challenge the public's stereotypes through featuring the stories of people living in refugee camps. All of these are in addition to various narratives published by several NGOs. However, since there are a few studies that analyzed these stories, chapter five will contribute to this section through a discussion of the conducted analysis on Syrian refugee narratives that were shared in some of these platforms.

## Chapter Five

### The Securitization and De-securitization of Syrian Refugees in the Lebanese Press

After having set the context for the theme of refugee securitization and after having explained the nexus between media and politics in Lebanon, this section will explain how print media engaged heavily with the issue of refugee securitization and with the portrayals of refugees as societal and political threats. Yet, it will also demonstrate that this engagement has not been monolithic or homogeneous. Rather, through two illustrative cases, I show that media outlets have presented differentiated discursive perspectives on the extent to which refugees can be framed as threats and risks.

#### 5.1 *Annahar*

First and foremost, the published articles of *Annahar* were very politicized and heavily quoted (for example “Basil: Lebanon,” 2019; “Geagea wishes,” 2019; “Lavrentiev met,” 2019), demonstrating that the newspaper was used only as a medium to convey the voice of specific actors instead of discussing various issues and events. Indeed, the majority of articles in *Annahar* included merely the voice of politicians or mayors, except one quote of a Syrian activist (for example “Destroying a civil defense,” 2019; “Basil: Lebanon,” 2019; “Geagea wishes,” 2019). Conversely, the voice of Syrian refugees was to a large extent absent even though most articles revolved around their case (for example “Fontes considered,” 2019; “Basil: Lebanon,” 2019; “Destroying a civil defense,” 2019). This remark mirrors previous

studies on the hierarchy of voices and the absence of Syrian refugees' perspectives in the media which portrays them as voiceless and passive subjects.

In *Annahar*, similar results emerged in the accompanied photos that only showed politicians with one exception that depicted Syrian refugees from the back (for example, "Aoun: We always," 2019; "Fontes considered," 2019; "Destroying a civil defense," 2019). While politicians were photographed in their regular scenes, the single picture of refugees showcased a cue of handcuffed men ("Destroying a civil defense," 2019). This reflects the occurrence of security representations which aligns with former research that stressed the widespread adoption of this frame in the Lebanese media.

In fact, the constructed security threat was blatant in text content as well. According to the results of *Annahar*, Syrian refugees were discussed in an article full of security vocabulary such as attacks, arrest, stone throwing, hit, beat, and fight, all of which imply violence and menace ("Destroying a civil defense," 2019). Similarly, the emerging themes were about evictions, security measures, escape, and fear, which perfectly fits in a securitizing context ("Destroying a civil defense," 2019). In this article, the author opened and closed the text with a claim that accused Syrian refugees of attacking a member of civil defense as they were bothered by smoke ("Destroying a civil defense," 2019). Yet, the author also included one counter argument of a Syrian activist who blamed the civil defense of smashing a tent that had Syrian refugee children inside, which as he argued, was the reason that pushed Syrian refugees to attack him back ("Destroying a civil defense," 2019). Although the journalist did not explicitly state his opinion and despite the fact that he incorporated both opposing claims ("Destroying a civil defense," 2019), does not reflect much neutrality. This argument stems from the implied biased communication

techniques that he used. For example, he repeated the accusation of Syrian refugees twice and positioned it in the introduction and conclusion (“Destroying a civil defense,” 2019), which are important sections of a text. This implies his attempt of convincing the audience that Syrian refugees were the first who attacked. This hint was also bolstered with the title of the article that was exclusive to the attack of the civil defense, as well as the associated pictures which only provided an evidence of the injured civil defense member and the arrest of Syrian refugees (“Destroying a civil defense,” 2019). Moreover, it was clear that this article is an accurate example of securitization as it did not only accuse Syrian refugees of such a crime but also used it as an excuse to legitimize extraordinary measures. Indeed, the writer presented the quotes of the mayors along with the partisan and religious actors of the area who all announced a declaration that says, “as a result of the widespread public outrage, and in order to protect the safety of the displaced, as well as to prohibit the reoccurrence of such incident which may lead to unbearable consequences, the following decision has been taken...” (“Destroying a civil defense,” 2019). Their decision mainly prohibited the return of Syrian refugees who were evicted from the camps and assigned the police and municipalities the task of supervising the entrances of the camp to ensure that none of them will comeback (“Destroying a civil defense,” 2019). In their declaration the actors created a sense of urgency and referred to the internalization of the threat within the public to justify the eviction of Syrian refugees, which is a clear securitizing action.

Still in *Annahar*, Syrian refugees were also associated with other security issues such as the problem of overcrowded prisons in Lebanon. Although the article mainly discussed the aforementioned issue, it linked the proliferation of the problem to the large number of Syrian refugees (“Al-Hasan: We are,” 2019). Take for example this

quote that was integrated in the text, “the problem of prisons, which is exacerbated by the presence of more than one million and half displaced Syrians in Lebanon,” which was also repeated in other words when the article mentioned, “overcrowding in prisons is a result of the security conditions the country has experienced and the population density in the presence of the Syrian displacement as well.” (“Al-Hasan: We are,” 2019). Basically, the author illuminated that Syrian refugees caused overpopulation which led to a rise in security cases, and which in turn worsened the issue of crowded jails. This linkage that was repeated twice in the text further reinforces the construction of Syrian refugees as a security and demographic threat. In fact, anxiety on overpopulation was widely mentioned in most articles as the majority insisted on recalling the large number of Syrian refugees (“The Saudis are comfortable,” 2019; “Jebk: To develop,” 2019; Hallaq, 2019).

The framing of Syrian refugees as a security threat was reiterated in another article in *Annahar* along with other threat frames as well. In this text, a politician said, “Palestinian and Syrian refugees existence yield negative effects at the economic, security, and educational level of Lebanon which is no longer able to endure this” (“Aoun: We always,” 2019). He further stated, “if Lebanon will keep hosting the large number of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, Lebanon will not exist anymore as its demography will change completely” (“Aoun: We always,” 2019). In other words, this politician constructed Syrian refugees as an existential, economic, security, educational, and demographic threat to Lebanon. In fact, the latter quote was replicated as a title in the recap of important news (“Lebanon will not exist,” 2019), stressing its significance. It is important to add that the purpose of this statement was to convince the West to accept the return of Syrian refugees, which is a call that has been echoed in other articles as well (“Aoun: We always,” 2019; “Fontes

considered,” 2019; “Basil: Lebanon,” 2019). This indicates the current undesirable presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Another article in *Annahar* was dedicated mostly to the speech of former foreign minister of Lebanon that he delivered in a conference against Syrian refugees (“Basil at the,” 2019). Most sections in this text overwhelmingly discussed the return of Syrian refugees and the threats they pose to host states as well as the incapability of Lebanon in accommodating them (“Basil at the,” 2019). In other words, there was an overlap of themes in a manner that links the threats of refugees to the call for the return of refugees. These themes were pertaining to crimes, security procedures, weapon possessions, higher unemployment, overcrowding in a single house and much more (“Basil at the,” 2019).

This foreign minister began his speech by shedding light on the unmodified law of municipalities and the failure of the state and government in achieving their responsibilities only to then call for the help of municipalities and request their intervention in the case of Syrian refugees (“Basil at the,” 2019). His logic is explained in the literature review that highlighted the absence of policies and the ambiguity in the system and how this is deliberately used to legitimize informal practices especially at the level of municipalities. The minister proceeded to emphasize the difference between the Syrian and Palestinian case arguing that unlike Syrians, the latter are unable to go back to their country (“Basil at the,” 2019). This shows that he does not consider the current Syrian population as refugees; rather he believes they are just like any other voluntary migrant. This point ties well with the previously mentioned argument of Human Rights Watch and Karam wherein they explicated how securitizing decisions were partially justified by the confusion of the

two types of migration. Therefore, by denying that Syrians are refugees, the speaker paves the way for securitization.

Related to this perception is the representation of Syrian refugees as economic migrants. Indeed, the speech of this foreign minister employed the adjective “economic” to describe the migration of Syrians to Lebanon (“Basil at the,” 2019). In this regard, he deemed Syrians the reason behind the increase in the level of unemployment (“Basil at the,” 2019). As he uttered, “we will not accept that the Lebanese remain unemployed, while the Syrian displaced works illegally” (“Basil at the,” 2019). This is the first move that has been clarified in the theoretical framework, the second move was then to call for stricter measures. This is exactly what this minister did when he articulated, “mayors must withdraw licenses and prevent the opening of shops that the Syrian worker has no legal right to open” (“Basil at the,” 2019). Clearly, the actor first framed Syrian refugees as an economic threat to legitimize the withdrawal of licenses and closure of shops.

In line with the previous articles, this minister also portrayed Syrian refugees as a security threat. In doing so, he linked Syrian refugees to the increase in level of crime (“Basil at the,” 2019). He further reinforced this frame with the following statements, “...the Lebanese army is taking precautionary and preventive measures for the Lebanese arenas” and “on the Lebanese scene, the security situation is no longer tolerated as refugee camps has at least light and medium weapons” (“Basil at the,” 2019). Evidently, he shared these statements to justify rigorous measures and call for refugee return.

In this securitizing discourse, this minister also perceived Syrian refugees as a burden. To illustrate, he mentioned, “the international community is the reason behind the displacement crisis and that any burden sharing is not true as the Lebanese

state does not benefit from aid” (“Basil at the,” 2019). While he claimed that Syrian refugees are a burden, he obviously did not add their positive contributions, which were absent in all sample ( for example “Basil at the,” 2019; “Lavrentiev met,” 2019; “Jebk: To develop,” 2019). This matches the previously discussed issue of the unbalanced discourses that represent refugees as a mere burden.

Furthermore, the us/them construction was very clear in this speech that attempts to create divisions and monger fear (“Basil at the,” 2019).

Another remark that was noticed in all findings of *Annahar* is that this outlet employs the label ‘displaced’ for Syrian refugees in Lebanon (for example “The Russian presidential,” 2019; “Lavrentiev met,” 2019; “Al-Hasan: We are,” 2019) whereas it uses the word ‘refugee’ when it refers to Syrians in other countries such as Turkey, Jordan, or the U.S. (for example “Third governmental,” 2019; “Syrian refugee,” 2019; “Istanbul announces,” 2019). The only exception occurred in a rare article that de-securitized Syrian refugees in Lebanon and used the term ‘refugee’ (Sanaa, 2019). This confirms that the word ‘displaced’ supports securitization as it clarifies the unrecognition of the refugee status, and thus, the deflection from the responsibilities that it imposes. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the fact that the one text that de-securitized Syrian refugees in *Annahar* was an opinion article, whereas most articles that securitized this group were either classified in local news or the politics category. This indicates that *Annahar* attempted to fabricate balance and position itself as a fair press; however, its main articles did not actually de-securitize Syrian refugees as this newspaper only allowed de-securitization in the opinion section. This is indeed problematic for the audience, knowing that opinion texts do not weigh as news articles.

## 5.2 *Al Akhbar*

*Al Akhbar* newspaper included some sections that channeled or conveyed how politicians securitized through their speech acts the issue of displacement from Syria. Indeed, this outlet presented some securitizing speeches of politicians (“Basil: This government,” 2019) and used the metaphor “wave” to describe the Syrian displacement and escape (Anjreeni, 2019), which is a communication strategy used for the dehumanization of Syrian refugees. Additionally, it published an article on the potential influence of Palestinian riots on Syrian refugees, arguing that if this will happen, no one can restrict their movement as their case is difficult to regulate, because unlike Palestinians, Syrians have no recognized camps, and thus, no one is responsible for their management (Al-Choufy, 2019). This implies the fear of potential Syrian displaced’s movements. However, and surprisingly, these patterns were only an exception in a large sample that demonstrated immense efforts in de-securitizing Syrian refugees. First, this press acknowledged the securitization in the Lebanese media sector and political speeches, which then used as a source to criticize (for example Arammaal, 2019; Mohsen, 2019). Unlike *Annahar*, *Al akhbar* commented and debated the dominant and controversial topics on Syrian refugees (for example (Zbeeb, 2019 a; Al Ghusayn, 2019; Farfour, 2019 a).

This newspaper represented Syrians as refugees and contextualized their case. For example, it has been posted, “the war uprooted no less than 9 million Syrians from their houses” (Anjreeni, 2019, p.12). By providing a context of the Syrian war, it proved that Syrians are refugees and not voluntary migrants. In order to reinforce this representation *Al Akhbar* reiterated, “there is a real refugee issue that was engendered from the devastating war in Syria” (Mohsen, 2019, p. 12). In the same context, and as a critic of a discriminating tweet that was shared by a religious leader, this press

wrote, “ none of them have chosen to live the tragedy of being homeless and to be seen as a burden in the eyes of others” (Abi Saab, 2019, p. 8). All of these representations counter the migrant frame and legitimize their flight and their treatment as people who should be granted protection.

In a similar direction, *Al Akhbar* dedicated a whole article that provided interesting facts and arguments to debunk the representation of Syrian refugees as an economic threat. In this article, the author argued that there is an old misunderstanding that still governs the case of Syrians’ employment in Lebanon (Zbeeb, 2019 b). He highlighted that the dominant populist discourse is the one that describes Syrian workers under the rationale of Syria’s exploitation of Lebanon’s economy and taking the job opportunities and salaries of the Lebanese people (Zbeeb, 2019 b). The article continued to counter this logic arguing that it is actually Lebanon’s exploitation of the Syrian cheap labor, and not the opposite (Zbeeb, 2019 b). Throughout this piece, the author talked about the historical context of Syrian workers in Lebanon asserting that their large presence is not only linked to the arrival of refugees in 2011 (Zbeeb, 2019 b). Rather, it is almost a fundamental component of the workforce in Lebanon (Zbeeb, 2019 b). He also added that the development of Lebanon’s economy including its crises and growth was accompanied with the heavy reliance on foreign workers as Lebanese citizens migrated to other countries (Zbeeb, 2019 b).

Moreover, it is important to note that *Al Akhbar* provides evidence for its claims relying on different sources, which adds more credibility to the presented information. In the above argument, the author referred to a book that revealed the large employment of Palestinians and Syrians since 1948 which created cheap labor in the sectors of agriculture and construction (Zbeeb, 2019 b). The journalist also disclosed discrimination against these workers and their occupation of positions that

do not attract enough Lebanese workers (Zbeeb, 2019 b). He further elucidated that most Lebanese migrants are skilled, whereas migrant workers in Lebanon are unskilled, stressing that this has been always the case whether before or after the wars in Lebanon and in Syria (Zbeeb, 2019 b). As seen above, *Al akhbar* effectively countered the depiction of Syrian refugees as an economic threat by presenting strong sub arguments and credible evidence. Evidently, this newspaper adopted the objectivist strategy of Huysmans in the de-securitization of Syrian refugees.

In response to the securitizing actors who blame Syrian refugees for divides in Lebanon, *Al Akhbar* wrote an article wherein it explained that although sectarianism exists within the Lebanese society, it does not stem from the public; rather it is ignited by politicians who build on these divides for their own purposes (Al-Kosayfi, 2019). The journalist added that the same situation happens for Syrian and Palestinian refugees (Al-Kosayfi, 2019). Likewise, there was another article that supported the same argument and stated, “the emperors of the Lebanese system, those who created this dilemma, continue to manipulate it for sordid purposes. Others count on feelings of racism and fear to raise their popularity” (Abi Saab, 2019, p.8). Basically, both show that the one to blame is the politicians who create threats for their political ends, which was previously explained by Fakhoury in the literature review. On this basis, it is evident that *Al Akhbar* challenged discourses that perceive Syrian refugees as a demographic threat.

As has been shown earlier, *Annahar* framed Syrian refugees as an issue to the educational sector. However, *Al Akhbar* highlighted that a large number of Syrian refugees are not enrolling in schools (Farfour, 2019 b), which contradicts the widespread statements that shed light on how Lebanese schools are overcrowded with Syrian students. The author further explained that this was due to the teachers

who violently punish young students (Farfour, 2019 b). In this regard, the article revealed that “42 cases of the documented punishment (80%) affected Syrian children” (Farfour, 2019 b, p.6). Moreover, the writer noted, “the report pointed out that two government schools in the Bekaa and the North are now without Syrian students, after parents stopped sending their children to the afternoon classes, due to the employees’ assaults” (Farfour, 2019 b, p.6). These data broke the image of Syrian refugees as an educational threat and framed them as victim of violence and discrimination in schools.

Contrary to the findings of *Annahar* that only shared the pictures and voices of politicians, an article in *Al Akhbar* attached some pictures that portrayed Syrian refugees (Anjreeni, 2019). These images mostly reflected the suffering of this group. Thereby, this article deconstructed the faceless refugee and reinforced their humanization. Concerning their voices, the press did not fail in incorporating their quotes. Take for example the quote of Abdullah, a Syrian refugee who said to *Al Akhbar*, “the many obstacles that encounter our return to our city are not temporary, and they will not be” (Anjreeni, 2019, p.12). The fact that this press added refugee quotes disintegrate the framing of Syrian refugees as voiceless actors. Another notice in such findings is the inclusion of refugee names (Anjreeni, 2019), which is an efficient strategy that personalize Syrian refugees, and that in turn, destroy their collectivization of a threatening entity.

Moreover, it is important to add that *Al Akhbar* deconstructed the us/them dichotomy and rather depicted Syrian refugees as a familiar group. As has been written in an article, “Refugees of all different groups, which should not be limited to one stereotyped image, are not a threat, they are not enemies, but brothers” (Abi Saab, 2019, p.8). The author also mentioned, “our Syrian people in Lebanon” (Abi

Saab, 2019, p.8). These two statements followed the de-constructivist strategy of Huysmans which happens through breaking down the rhetoric, that constructed the unified other as a menace, into a much further fragmentary identity. In other words, it strives to fragment the refugee into a familiar identity to the audience. In this sense, it turns a refugee from a burden to a brother, exactly as the journalist did.

Related to the burden frame, *Al Akhbar* tried to compensate the unbalanced discourse. In doing so, it shared their positive contributions (Farfour, 2019 a; Abi Saab, 2019). As an illustration, a released article stated, “An important part of them is serving the economy and meeting urgent needs in different sectors” (Abi Saab, 2019, p.8). Therefore, it is clear that this newspaper challenged the image of Syrian refugees as a mere burden.

## Chapter Six

### Syrian Refugee Voices

As has been proven in the previous chapter, by providing a channel for transmitting politicians' speech acts and concerns, *Annahar* alienated to a great extent the voice and image of Syrian refugees. *Annahar* was no exception. Various media outlets in fact propagated these security narratives. In yet another perspective, we cannot assume that the discursive process of securitization in the media was monolithic. Indeed as *Al Akhbar* example shows, journalists sought to de-securitize this issue, and present alternative narrative framings. Adding to this, refugees, as actors in their own right have also sought to convey their own voices, and de-securitize prevalent and mainstream framings. Against this backdrop, this section will seek to explore how Syrian refugees sought to transmit various counter-narratives that amplified their voices and stories. Through an exploration of their own narratives and a discussion on the emerging self-frames, this chapter will shed light on the self-representations of Syrian refugees and their responses to securitizing content such as that of *Annahar*.

The analyzed stories belonged to different Syrian refugees representing both binary genders and various age groups including children, youth, and adults (for example Save the Children, 2019; Africa Muslims Agency, 2019; British Council, n.d.). These differences in turn reflect the plurality and diversity of refugees' experiences (Sigona, 2014). Moreover, these digital narratives were either in form of direct-yet translated- quotes (for example Bailey-King, 2019; Habitat for Humanity, 2019; Save the Children, 2019) or videos that recorded refugees talking about their experiences (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019; Campji, 2019; International Medical Corps, 2019).

With their words, they obliterated their portrayals as voiceless objects and proved their agency and capability in representing themselves. Although both approaches conveyed the same story and deconstructed the voiceless refugee, videography is more effective in such deconstruction as it shares their real voices instead of the translated text quotes; thereby, it evidently adds more credibility to the story. It is also important to add that all of the text narratives were accompanied with the pictures of each Syrian refugee (for example McNally, 2019; Habitat for Humanity, 2019; British Council, n.d.) which in turn helped in deconstructing their dehumanization. Additionally, most cases highlighted the name of refugees, whether their real one or a substitute (for example Campji, 2019; Save the Children, 2019; Bailey-King, 2019), yet in either cases this strategy ensured the personalization of Syrian refugees while it broke their collectivization.

## **6.1 Syrian Refugee Narratives**

The first article was published by Habitat for Humanity, an international British charity (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). The latter disseminated stories of refugee women so that they receive justice for the daily cruelty they endure, as well as to empower them and ensure the recognition of their efforts, strength, and resilience (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). The story of Sahab, a single mother living in Lebanon, is a one example (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). This refugee woman spoke about her large family which is composed of her six children and her old sick mother (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). She detailed how difficult it was to meet the needs of her family in a harsh environment (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). She then elaborated on the hardships she faced explaining the issue of her missing husband and the bad living conditions of her small house (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Against this background, she stressed her ability in finding a job that allowed her to raise her

children and pay for all the necessities including water and electricity (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). At the end, she closed the story with her emphasis on hard work and passing this determination to her children instead of pushing them to beg on the streets (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Next to her quotes appeared four pictures that testified upon her job as a cashier, her positive spirit on a smiley face, and her efforts in house chores where she is depicted cooking and serving her family (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). On the same article, they incorporated the story of Inaam, a 23 years old Syrian refugee who began by describing her escape from Syria and the suffering she underwent (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). She also explicated the severe challenges that she and her family encountered in Lebanon from their first stay in a tent to the unsafe small house that they rented (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). She later expressed her resoluteness in supporting her family and her wish for return (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Likewise, the author clipped a portrait of Inaam along with three pictures of her with her family (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). An important conclusion of this article proved the desire of these women in sharing their narratives (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). As the author explicitly wrote, “what I noticed throughout the week was that the women we spoke to wanted to share their stories” (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). This means that Syrian refugees are willing and capable of sharing their stories, but some media outlets are the ones that did not give them a platform.

The second article was titled ‘I Wish I Never Got Married’: The Story of Two Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (Bailey-King, 2019). It was presented on June by ‘Girls Not Brides’, a global partnership and an international NGO that aims to eradicate child marriage in the world (Bailey-King, 2019). The first narrative was that of Maisa who shared her story to advocate against child marriage as she stated, “I want to give a

message to every girl out there: do not get married until you are at least 20. For every girl that is still young, live your childhood and do not grow up faster than you need to” (Bailey-King, 2019). Maisa opened her story by reminiscing her happy entertaining childhood in Syria and her educational success (Bailey-King, 2019). She then flipped the story to the civil war and seeking refuge in Lebanon where she has been living for six years (Bailey-King, 2019). She continued to discuss her marital status claiming that she was married at the age of 15 and got divorced after six months due to serious marital issues (Bailey-King, 2019). She also alluded to the difficulty of her life which she thinks became worse after her divorce, yet she still regrets her marriage (Bailey-King, 2019). In concluding, she underlined her dream of pursuing education and making an impact on the world and on her life (Bailey-King, 2019). Following this story, Hanan, another Syrian refugee girl recounted a similar experience (Bailey-King, 2019). By the same token, she proceeded with the memory of enrolling in school and how happy she was throughout her childhood in Syria (Bailey-King, 2019). The story lines moved towards her struggles in Lebanon including her isolation and huge responsibility which resulted from her early marriage at the age of 13 (Bailey-King, 2019). However, these encounters did not extinguish her future aspirations as her dream of continuing education and becoming a doctor was clearly uttered by her words (Bailey-King, 2019). Finally, she joined Maisa in her call against child marriage by conveying a message to every girl, which says, “focus on your education and the goals you have set for yourself. Do not leave your education at an early age. Keep up a sense of ambition” (Bailey-King, 2019). This quote along with the aforementioned saying of Maisa reflect the efforts of Syrian refugees in combating social issues and how they used their personal experiences to share awareness and advice other children. From this we can infer that

they are potential actors who care about the society. At the end of this article, the NGO added a paragraph that explicated the factors behind child marriage which gave a context to the girls' stories (Bailey-King, 2019). Additionally, the author stressed the NGO's support to these girls (Bailey-King, 2019).

The plight of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon was exacerbated by the securitizing policies of the country. This was evident in the publication of Save the Children that involved the story of refugees who live in Aarsal (Save the Children, 2019), a town that borders Syria and accommodates a large number of refugees. Indeed, their narrative was a response to the implementation of shelter demolitions (Save the Children, 2019). In explaining its ramifications on their lives, they described their homelessness and augmenting fears in conditions that deprive them of their very basic right to sleep (Save the Children, 2019). They also complained about living under the sun and its burning heat with literally no roof to protect them from getting sick (Save the Children, 2019). Their words were illustrated in a photo that depicted them in a sunny place next to a dismantled house (Save the Children, 2019).

Basically, the NGO reported the situation in the camp and used their quotes as evidence, as well as it mentioned its support to these children when it announced the new space they opened for children to play (Save the Children, 2019).

In the same context of refugees' reactions to the order of shelter demolitions, Africa Muslims Agency, an Islamic humanitarian organization, recorded the claims of various Syrian refugees who expressed their grief, fears, and helplessness in moments when they felt ignored by everyone (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019). In this video, they stressed and repeated their simple request of a tent that makes them feel secured (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019). Overall, the recording was marked with refugees' cries and depictions of their destroyed walls (Africa Muslims Agency,

2019). This evidence proved the result of securitizing policies and how politicians worry about Tawteen or the constructed insecurity of refugee camps while they neglect the human rights of refugees and the innocence of many children.

Back to the narratives of strength and resilience, the International Medical Corps, a global, humanitarian, and nonprofit organization, uploaded a video of Souria, a widow Syrian refugee mother living in Lebanon who shared a story about volunteering in this organization (International Medical Corps, 2019). She first talked about the war in Syria and the death of her husband as well as the bad situation she experienced once she left her country (International Medical Corps, 2019). She then elucidated on how she met another volunteer in this organization who discussed with her the hardships she faced and informed her about the awareness sessions they held (International Medical Corps, 2019). According to her, the difficulties she encountered in Syria and in Lebanon, motivated her to volunteer in International Medical Corps so that she helps others (International Medical Corps, 2019). Souria further explained how her enrollment changed her from an isolated person to someone who likes talking to people and offering help in various ways (International Medical Corps, 2019). In closing, she expressed her happiness at work and the support of her daughters who are happy with her mission (International Medical Corps, 2019). Throughout the video I noticed her confidence in speaking to the camera, which reflects her capability and willingness of sharing this story.

In the same vein of refugee volunteerism, the British Council posted the quotes of Ruba, a Palestinian Syrian refugee in Lebanon whose narrative revolves around her contributions to the society, focusing especially on the project that she co-founded to bridge refugees with the host community (British Council, n.d.). Ruba clarified that she was living in a refugee camp in Syria before fleeing the country two years after

the eruption of the conflict (British Council, n.d.). In Lebanon, she taught the Arabic language to Syrian refugees and volunteered in some organizations to strengthen relations between refugees and local communities (British Council, n.d.).

Interestingly, she shed light on an initiative that she launched with other partners wherein they adopt theater, music, and art to gather youth and children who come from different countries (British Council, n.d.). This young woman believes that her engagement with youth underlined her positive leadership rather than her refugee perception (British Council, n.d.). She concluded by highlighting her goal of helping youth in becoming independent and fulfilling an effective role (British Council, n.d.). She also gave credit to Aswat Faeela (active voices) project for their support (British Council, n.d.). As in most refugee stories, Ruba's quotes were guided by an author who provided more details and context to her story (British Council, n.d.).

Apart from the humanitarian organizations and projects that shared refugee stories for different purposes, Campji, is a platform that was dedicated fully to the various voices of Syrian and Palestinian refugees (Campji, 2019). On July, this outlet published the video of Ibrahim Ismael, a Syrian refugee recounting a story about his job as a juice seller in Lebanon (Campji, 2019). Ibrahim is known as Abu Ali Al Sawaas, a proud Syrian who expressed his immense passion for his job which he considers a skill that was passed on through generations and which he mastered for more than 17 or 18 years; two years of which were spent in Lebanon (Campji, 2019). Although he mentioned that it is very tiring, he claimed that he works for many hours a day and prepare all that they request (Campji, 2019). Al Sawas clearly prefers Syria where he feels more comfortable as he thinks it is better for him in all aspects, and that he only came to Lebanon due the circumstances (Campji, 2019). Against this backdrop, he illuminated that he has Lebanese clients and people who like him

(Campji, 2019). He also added that they wait for him when he arrives late and ask about him whenever he is absent (Campji, 2019). This implies the good interaction between refugees and the community; thus, such a story breaks the ice between both groups and deconstructs the us/them dichotomy which helps in de-securitization as per the previously discussed thought of Aradau and Huysmans. On the video, he was portrayed with a traditional Arabic outfit that he wears whenever he goes to work as it makes him feel happy and lifts his spirits when people stop and take pictures with him (Campji, 2019).

Similar to this success story, the UNHCR shared the narrative of Mohammed, a Syrian refugee who lived in Lebanon before he resettled to Canada as a skilled worker (McNally, 2019). His integrated quotes primarily called for win-to-win solutions that activate the power of refugees (McNally, 2019). Indeed, in talking about his other fellow Syrian refugees in Lebanon, he commented on their knowledge, professional skills, and potential of achieving positive outcomes in communities (McNally, 2019). Mohammed closed his quote by criticizing the neglect of refugees' power (McNally, 2019). In this article, his words were accompanied with the compliments of his employer as well as the author's emphasis on the opportunity given to the refugee and how in turn, he supported the company and filled the lack of tech workers in Canada (McNally, 2019).

## **6.2 Identity Themes**

The abovementioned narratives provided different and similar experiences, as well as they implied various types of self-representations that attempted to de-securitize their image. This section will therefore present and discuss the emerging self-frames.

### **6.2.1 The Refugee**

Almost half of the Syrian refugee storytellers represented themselves as refugees. This has been deduced from their quotes that referred to the civil war in Syria. Take for example the sentence of Souria who said, “When the crisis started in Syria, gunfire was random” (International Medical Corps, 2019). Or that of Maisa who expressed, “When the civil war broke out, we sought refuge in Lebanon” (Bailey-King, 2019). Inaam also shared her memory of escaping Syria when their house was bombarded from all sides (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Basically, the refugee frame emerged from contextualization, which in turn counters the representation of Syrians as economic migrants that has been shown in the discourse of former foreign minister in *Annahar*. When readers recognize the gravity of the situation in Syria, they understand that these people did not voluntarily relocate to steal their jobs; rather they were coerced to flee. From this we can infer that refugees adopted the objectivist strategy of Huysmans.

### **6.2.2 The Homo-Sacer**

This identity theme has been inspired from the work of Charity (2016) who explained how refugees self-identify as a group that is trapped in the “zones of indistinction,” a concept coined by Agamben, that refers to those who do not have possessions in the sense of basic citizenship rights nor tangible aspects of human life, as well as those who are not subject to normal politics or eligible for protection. Indeed, numerous quotes of Syrian refugees reflected their portrayals as homo-sacer. For instance, one of them stated, “We just want a tent. We only want to be secured. That’s all” (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019). The same sentence has been repeated by another Syrian refugee as well (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019). This quote follows the de-constructivist strategy to depict refugees as people who only wants security just as

any other human. In the same context of humanity, an elderly added, “We are not animals, we are human beings. Even animals won't live in such circumstances” (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019). This specific statement explicitly attempts to deconstruct the dehumanization of Syrian refugees.

In another narrative that tackled the same issue of shelter demolition, Syrian children reported, “We sleep out here, in the open...we sleep on bricks, stack bricks and sleep” (Save the Children, 2019). These words challenge the economic migrant frame as they prove that these refugees are not able to afford at least a shelter, which generally migrants are able to manage. In this frame, the children further stressed their denial of other rights such as the right to play (Save the Children, 2019), which is clearly written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under Article 24. In nutshell, the identification of refugees as homo-sacer shows that Syrian refugees are the victims of securitizing policies, instead of an enemy that pose a threat.

### **6.2.3 The Victim**

Relevant to the above identity theme, Syrian refugees framed themselves as victims of insecurity. To illustrate, Inaam argued, “We never felt safe, we were broken into a couple of times” (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Similarly, Syrian children articulated, “we were never that scared in our lives” (Save the Children, 2019). Another Syrian refugee also mentioned a relevant rhetorical question which says, “You think I am not scared of becoming homeless?” (Africa Muslims Agency, 2019). These expressions imply that Syrian refugees are not a security threat; rather they are the ones who are threatened by the harsh policies of political actors.

In fact, both of the above frames were expected in these results as most of the selected cases were humanitarian organizations. Undoubtedly, such frames assist in attracting donations and support which is one of the important tasks undertaken by

organizations. However, this representation is highly controversial as many scholars addressed its negative implications. Sigona, for instance, in his chapter “*The Politics of Refugee Voices: Representations, Narratives, and Memories*” criticized the content of advocates and pro-asylum organizations that represent refugees as merely victims, arguing that such representations result in their depoliticization which restricts the image of refugees to powerless and helpless people instead of residents who enjoy political agency. Likewise, Pandir (2019) agrees with Sigona on the resulted depoliticization and further added that it creates various stereotypes such as weakness and vulnerability in relation to these individuals who survived a war. Furthermore, Poteet and Nourpanah asserted that the emphasis on the weakness of refugees may paradoxically bolster for stricter policies on refugees (as cited in Ghazal, 2019). Basically, balance should be achieved in humanitarian discourses as well in order to avoid the perpetuation of securitization.

#### **6.2.4 The Hard Worker**

Against this background, while some NGOs heavily relied on the victim frame such as the Africa Muslims Agency, other organizations were, to some extent, effective in making balance. As an illustration, Habitat for Humanity (2019) showcased the quote of Sahab who said, “I’m not lazy, I work hard.” She also stated, “I never want my children to beg for money. My children have to learn that they have to work hard” (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Similarly, Abu Ali affirmed, “whatever they request from us, we prepare it. We work in parties, events, anywhere” (Campji, 2019). Additionally, Syrian refugees did not only represent themselves as hard workers, but they also shed light on their competence and passion. In this view, when Mohammed spoke about his fellow professional Syrian refugees, he commented “they have knowledge, they have skills..” (McNally, 2019). As for the passionate self, Abu Ali

emphasized about his job, “It means everything to me. I love it” (Campji, 2019).

Interestingly, Syrian refugee children who are not eligible for work yet, did not fail to stress their ambitions and aspirations. As Hanan wished, “My dream now is to finish my education and become a doctor” (Bailey-King, 2019). All of these statements indirectly followed the objectivist strategy which persuades people that Syrian refugees are not merely a burden on the host country; rather they are active actors who make efforts to help themselves.

### **6.2.5 The Contributor**

Another identity theme that counters the burden frame is the contributor refugee.

This was demonstrated in the story of Sahab who mentioned, “I was able to find a job so that I can pay for the electricity, water...” (Habitat for Humanity, 2019) as well as in Inaam’s narrative wherein she wrote, “we found this small house to rent” (Habitat for Humanity, 2019). Basically, Syrian refugees did highlight some of their contributions that were often ignored in dominant discourses; thus, they broke the image of refugees as people who only take advantage of state benefits and organizations’ support.

### **6.2.6 The Positive Leader**

The contributions of Syrian refugees were not restricted to regular efforts but transcended to their community service activities as well. To begin with, Mohammed argued that Syrian refugees in Lebanon “can make a positive impact on communities” (McNally, 2019). This was proved in the story of Souria who represented herself as a volunteer in International Medical Corps (International Medical Corps, 2019). In this regard, Souria articulated, “I like talking with people and helping them in different aspects” (International Medical Corps, 2019). Likewise, Ruba is another refugee who played a very active role in communities (British

Council, n.d.). Throughout the narrative, she shared her volunteering experience with some organizations to improve “relations between host and refugee communities” (British Council, n.d.). Besides volunteerism, she co-founded an initiative that, according to her, “bring together young people and children of different nationalities through music, theater and art” (British Council, n.d.). Ruba’s aims are also directed towards helping others. As she wrote, “I want youth to have an independent and impactful role. This is my aim...” (British Council, n.d.). These opportunities allowed Ruba to downplay the refugee identity and frame herself as a leader. Indeed, Ruba contended, “I changed from being an exiled person seeking refuge to a positive leader” (British Council, n.d.). In fact, positive leadership has been instilled in Syrian refugee children as well. This was evident in Maisa’s story wherein she said, “My dream is to continue my education and make a difference in this world, and in my life”( Bailey-King, 2019). All of this background yielded the leader frame which effectively counters the image of refugees as mere burden. More importantly, it mirrors the intentions of Syrian refugees who are willing to positively contribute to the society and peacefully coexist in diverse communities, which in turn deconstruct the us/them divisions.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

Drawing on the securitization and de-securitization theories in my analysis, this thesis has explored the representation of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese print media as well as the self-representation of these refugees through their own narratives. As has been seen earlier, both of the academic sources and grey literature on this topic proved the misrepresentation and securitization of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese press. However, the above two case studies initiated another debate on the portrayal of this group with *Al Akhbar* breaking the process of securitization and presenting a different perspective to the studies that investigated the depiction of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese media. In other words, while the results of *Annahar* aligned with the previous studies, the findings derived from *Al Akhbar* showed that securitized portrayals of refugees in the print media were not monolithic.

On the one hand, *Annahar* shied away from representing Syrians as ‘refugees’ and rather framed them as an existential, security, demographic, educational, and economic threat to Lebanon. In all the articles I investigated, Syrian refugees were represented as faceless and voiceless, while politicians were often photographed and quoted. Furthermore, Syrian forced migrants were quantified and deemed a burden; as well as they were constructed as the ‘other’. Countering these depictions, the articles that I investigated in *Al Akhbar* presented alternative arguments and evidence in an attempt to de-securitize Syrian refugees.

In fact, the Qualitative Discourse Analysis (QDA) is the method that helped in generating the key findings and understanding the complexity of the processes.

Indeed, it assisted in breaking down the sample of texts into themes, patterns, and strategies to make sense of the raw data. Basically, QDA was very useful in unpacking the most important discursive techniques and elements used for the securitization and de-securitization of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese newspapers as well as in refugee narratives. In *Annahar*, this research method allowed for the extraction of security themes such as crimes, security procedures, weapon possessions, higher unemployment, evictions, escape, and fear. In terms of structure, this approach helped in mapping the link between security themes and other leitmotifs. For instance, it highlighted the linkage between threats and the call for refugee return. In the same column of structural features, the analysis identified the heavy reliance on the direct speeches of politicians in most articles of *Annahar*, which reflected the role of this newspaper as only a medium that conveys the voice of specific actors. On the other hand, the QDA revealed that *Annahar* used the passive tense to discuss Syrian refugees. These parallel patterns illuminated how the newspaper silenced refugees whereas it bolstered the voices of politicians. Moreover, in order to support a one-sided argument, an article in *Annahar* was structured in a manner that positions the accusation claim against Syrian refugees in the introduction, conclusion, and the main title of the text, while it included only one counter-argument in a single body paragraph. This structure explained how journalists can present a seemingly neutral article, yet implicitly employ biased communication techniques to convince the audience with a certain view that securitizes Syrian refugees. As for word choice, the analysis helped in identifying the labeling of Syrians as ‘displaced’ when securitizing Syrian refugees. With regard to grammar features, the method sheds light on the employment of the ‘we’ and ‘them’ pronouns that creates a division between the local community and Syrian refugees.

Finally, QDA detected the adjective ‘economic’ that was used to frame Syrians as economic migrants instead of refugees.

In *Al Akhbar*, the analysis spotted some rhetorical figures such as the ‘wave’ metaphor that is generally used to dehumanize Syrian refugees. This method also explored how *Al Akhbar* used historical references to deconstruct Syrian refugees as an economic threat by drawing on the history of foreign labor in Lebanon.

Furthermore, QDA discovered how this newspaper employed strong statements to assert the positive contributions of Syrian refugees. Concerning the structural features, many articles in *Al Akhbar* first presented an argument of a politician or a religious leader followed by several counter arguments that criticize their stance.

Unlike that of *Annahar*, this structure reflected the critical engagement of this press with controversial themes. Other articles in *Al Akhbar* also backed the counter arguments with various evidence from other sources that added credibility to the statements. Regarding word choice, the research method highlighted some specific terms such as ‘brothers,’ which helped in identifying the attempt of deconstructing the us/them dichotomy. Finally, QDA extracted the ‘real’ adjective that indicated the efforts of *Al Akhbar* in framing Syrians as true refugees instead of bogus or voluntary migrants.

In refugee narratives, the QDA helped in recognizing various themes such as hardships, positive leadership, hard work, contributions, refugeeism, child marriage, aspirations, responsibilities, and shelter demolitions. This research approach also pinpointed some linguistic mechanisms such as the employment of direct speeches that amplified refugee voices. Adding on, this method pointed out the use of personal names, which assisted in inferring the personalization of refugees in these narratives. In terms of historical references, it was shown that many Syrian refugees referred to

the war in Syria to create contextualization for their flight which in turn helped in their self-representation as refugees. Additionally, the QDA noted a rhetorical question that a refugee used to express her fears of homelessness. As for the structure of the stories, the analysis revealed how almost every narrative overwhelmingly dealt with one discourse to stress one main point. This implied how stories were used to achieve a specific purpose such as sharing awareness, acknowledging women's resilience, or attracting donations. Moreover, these discourses were accompanied with video clips or pictures that testified upon the story and deconstructed the image of refugees as faceless. Basically, the QDA was useful in understanding the discursive process of securitization and de-securitization and the important role of language in framing Syrian refugees.

On another note, it is necessary to discuss the platforms that shared refugee narratives. Indeed, this thesis has sought to highlight that various outlets have transmitted refugee self-representations and voices. Still, many shortcomings ought to be highlighted. Most of the analyzed stories were shared on the websites of international organizations, so these outlets do not represent grassroots platforms. Indeed, it is essential to investigate the extent to which Syrian refugee narratives were able to draw on local and grassroots platforms to amplify their voices.

Additionally, as my sample was limited to a time frame, it is important to widen the scope of this research. It is worth noting that beyond this time frame, it is possible to identify various blogs that have conveyed Syrian refugee voices and narratives from a grassroots viewpoint. For instance, let us consider *Sawa* (together), a Syrian organization based in Lebanon that constantly shares Syrian refugee voices through the videos that it posts on its media pages. Lately, it has created a series of episodes called Covid VS Refugee that covers the narratives of Syrian refugees during times

of this pandemic (Sawa for Development and Aid, 2020). On this basis, it is highly recommended that future research analyzes such narratives that originate from local outlets.

Though my research has restricted itself to two key illustrative cases of Lebanon's print media and to a limited sample of blogs and websites channeling refugee voices, it is important to highlight the broader connotations of this research. By framing how multiple voices engage differently with refugeeness, media narratives reveal how the discursive process of securitization versus de-securitization is in practice a complex dynamic that requires an insight into various context-specific factors and legacies. Furthermore, by showing how two print media outlets have engaged with the theme of refugee securitization through different discursive narratives and counter-narratives, my research challenges the portrayal of refugee securitization as monolithic in Lebanon. Basically, my thesis points out to the necessity of studying discursive securitization in Lebanon's print media as a complex and multifaceted process that engaged with refugee narratives and politicians' security speech acts in various ways. Indeed, it calls for studying how the media landscape has constructed differentiated, complex, and heterogeneous concepts of refugeeness.

In closing, it is of particular importance to suggest some recommendations for the media sector in Lebanon. First, there should be contact and discussions between the journalists of national media outlets and refugee reporters. This will yield an important dialogue that debunks any misconceptions. Second, media outlets should be separated from political ownership and influence, or at least the owner should declare his/her political affiliation. Third, journalists should interview and quote refugees as this will not only provide accurate representations, but it will also ensure

refugees' right to freedom of expression. As for activists, it is recommended that they advocate for the practical implementation of media regulations.

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Lebanon will not exist if half million Palestinian refugee and one million 600 thousand

Syrian refugees will stay in it (عون: لا يعود للبنان من وجود إذا بقي فيه نصف مليون لاجيء

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The Russian presidential delegate met Aoun and Basil ... "The Russian-Lebanese relations

are very good" (الموفد الرئاسي الروسي التقى عون وباسيل... "العلاقات الروسية اللبنانية جيدة جداً")

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%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%89-

%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%A7-

%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9-

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A9

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%86-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-

%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-

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%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-

%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF

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%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB-%D9%81%D9%8A-

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-8-

%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-

%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7-

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