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The Dilemma of the Syrian Refugees:
Are They a Threat to Lebanon and the Lebanese?

By

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ABSTRACT

Syrian refugees are often perceived as threats to the Lebanese state and the Lebanese population's welfare and security. This research argues that Syrian refugees have both positive and negative impacts on Lebanon. Moreover, it finds that Lebanese identity construction and differentiation contributes to how Syrian refugees are categorized due to several considerations. Lastly, under the rigid power sharing political structure in Lebanon, Syrian refugees could be considered threatening for some groups while in fact, it is the current political structure that should be revised to build more inclusive progressive national identity.

Key words: Identity, Lebanon, Migration, Syrian Refugees, Threat Construction, Governance

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Chapter One

Introduction

Lebanese domestic politics has been drastically affected by regional forces and events. In fact, successful regime formation and maintenance in Lebanon is highly based on both internal as well as foreign elite relations through power sharing (Geukjian, 2018). Current Lebanese politics is associated by external powers particularly by two coalitions (Parliamentary Assembly, 2017). Therefore, chaos in the region, especially in Syria, can easily be conveyed into Lebanon (Yacoubian, 2011). Different scenarios for Syrian's politics pose direct impact on the Lebanese status quo, through provoking conflicts and tensions or agreement and progress which consolidate and even escalate instability.

Lebanon's consociation regime perpetuates power-sharing institutions through sustaining and nurturing the relationships that tie internal parties to external powers. These institutions, in the Lebanese case, continue to exist as long as the regional status quo is endured (Geukjian, 2018). The Syrian crisis has been no exception.

The Syrian war started in 2011 and Lebanon has faced multifaceted challenges ever since. In the course of the decade-long Syrian crisis, Lebanon has been forced to bear numerous burdens, from humanitarian crisis, economic downturn, and sectarian conflict (Reliefweb, 2013). The repercussions of the Syrian crisis have been most clear in the refugee influx into Lebanon (MacQueen & Baxter, 2014). This thesis investigates when and how the mass movement of

Syrian refugees is recognized as a threat to Lebanon with its different aspects. It problematizes the threat imposed by their existence on Lebanon through the consequences determined after their displacement. This chapter introduces the topic and discusses why it is important to discuss before laying out how the rest of the thesis is organized.

Starting in 2011, pro-democracy uprisings started to spread in different Arab countries refusing the authoritarian regimes of their governments and demanding freedom and good governance. The end of 2011 marked the eruption of peaceful protests in the Syrian Arab Republic that soon converted to conflict and violence. The initially nonviolent uprising quickly switched to armed opposition facing the security forces and the mass detention of protesters. As the revolution spiraled into a militarized civil conflict, Syrians started to flee for safety especially residents of high-risk areas due to military activities and areas that are considered opposing to the Assad regime (Holliday, 2013)

Lebanon, which borders Syria, initially had an open border policy and a weak border management system when a fresh influx of 5000 Syrian refugee into the northern Lebanon occurred in April 2011 (UNHCR, 2013). By the beginning of 2015 their number had reached 1.2 million Syrian registered by UNHCR (Dionigi, 2016). That stage marked a perceived tipping point with the influx of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon amounting to quarter of the country's population. In May 2015, the Lebanese government suspended the registration process of the Syrian refugees entering the state (Dionigi, 2016). This marked the government's shift to a more "closed-border" policy through limiting the access of refugees to the country by setting strict legal measures and border processes (Dionigi, 2016). Yet, the refugee population in Lebanon continued to increase, reaching 1.5 million refugee in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020) although

Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention of Refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2019) and has no legal framework for refugees or asylum seekers (Fakhoury, 2017).

The Lebanese response to the Syrian crisis, and particularly the influx of Syrians into Lebanon, was shaped by four factors: the extreme scale of the Syrian refugee burden on a feeble state, demographic alarms, the Palestinian refugee experience, and the political disruption that caused inconsistent refugee policy (Yehya, Kassir, & El Hariri, 2018). As a result, the Lebanese approach to the crisis consisted of arbitrary policy strategies and implementations and is characterized by the “no policy” policy (El Mufti, 2014). Therefore, the Syrian population in Lebanon was expected to, and did, grow in an unprecedented magnitude (Stevens, 2014).

In fact, the demography of both countries, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon is highly affected by migration factors especially the emerging forced movement of refugees, registered and unregistered refugees, across the border between Syria and Lebanon. In a country where its nationals are estimated to be 5.5 million (*Annhar*, 2019), the Lebanese government estimated that 1.5 million Syrian refugees were being hosted in Lebanon in 2019 with approximately 18,000 refugee and asylum seekers from another countries (UNHCR, 2020).

As a matter of fact, several scholars started to talk about a high rate of population growth among Syrian refugees in Lebanon and considered their increase quite significant fairly early on in the Syrian conflict. According to Faour (2015) the percentage of children under the age 5 among Syrian refugees is 19.4 % three times higher than of Lebanese which is 6.9%. The percentage of children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon between age 5 and 17 is 33.8%. According to (2019), the percentage if males between age 18-59 is 18.5% and females is 23.3%. The

percentage of those above 60 is for males 1.1% and females 1.4%. Therefore we are noticing demographic transition in Lebanon due to the existing number of young Syrian refugees and to the different demographic characteristics among Syrian and Lebanese (Faour, 2015).

Moreover, urban densification was anticipated to rise by one-third with a population density increasing from 400 to 520 persons per square kilometer in which in December 2014 more than one in each four people was a de facto Syrian refugee or a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon (Gonzalez & Delgado, 2016).

Due the large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their positive momentum growth, it is crucial to investigate their influence from a scientific perspective and weigh their effects on the state and national population that is hosting more refugees per capita than anywhere else in the world.

It is important to highlight that population numbers do not alone tell a complete story. The presence of Syrian refugees has also provided a large supply of cheap labor for local companies and increased the consumption rate from local shops which have experienced increased revenues (Elkhoury, 2017). Other studies declare that the presence of the international organizations responding to the Syrian refugee crisis created different opportunities for the host community to receive aid and to get employed (Vliet & Hourani, 2014). On the other hand, other scholars have argued exactly the opposite on a wide spectrum (Hourani & Vliet, 2014).

1.1 Why it's important to address

Prominent studies have investigated the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis and their population growth on the Lebanese social, political, and economic structure and institutions (MSF, 2021; ILO, 2014; Secen, 2020; Cherri, Gonzalez, Delgado, 2016). Conflicting theories and analysis have attempted to elucidate the impact of Syrian refugee population chiefly the emerging demographic changes and its transpired population growth. This research seeks to explore the assumed threat of the Syrian refugee existence on Lebanon and to study the foundation of this assumption. Through in-depth analysis, the thesis will describe various indicators to investigate how the Syrian refugee population is perceived as a threat to the Lebanese society. This thesis also brings forth a critical component of how Lebanese government and political elites have used the Syrian refugee presence in the country to further their own political and other goals. It draws on how the inconsistent and incoherent policies of the Lebanese government have shaped the existence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their impact of Lebanese society. In the broader context of migration studies, this study reveals what and how refugee's reality is constructed within a weak state and fragile institutions.

The topic is of utmost significance because the plight of refugees globally transcends one country or region and is indeed a pressing international concern. The topic is also important given the prominence of the number of the Syrian influx in Lebanon and its pressing conditions and implications on demographics, the economy, social service system, politics, and security. Moreover, the topic's importance demands description and analysis of not only the Syrian population in Lebanon but also the multiple weaknesses of the Lebanese state in order to come

to more pragmatic conclusions and recommendations. In other words, the social threats faced by refugees in a context of feeble institutions and absent necessary state interference speak to a broader literature on refugee policies and on the impact of refugees on hosting countries.

1.2 Research question: How are Syrians in Lebanon a threat?

The thesis focuses on the central question: How are Syrian refugees in Lebanon a threat?

Against this backdrop, it investigates the impact of the Syrian refugee influx on Lebanese society in several ways.

The research interrogates the constructed positive and negative influences of the Syrian refugees as the independent variables and their impact on the Lebanese society on different aspects as the dependent variable.

This study draws on the critical literature of forced migration and the data collected and analyzes it through the theory of constructivism to better understand the reality of the Syrian refugee's threat in Lebanon. Constructivism questions conventional ontologies of the state-society interaction. It uses an inter-subjective dimension that highlights the mutually constituting role of the agent and the structure to analyze and disassemble the situation. Using the constructivist approach, the thesis attempts to explain the impact of the Syrian population, particularly through its demographic increase in Lebanon. Constructivism emphasizes the social construction of knowledge as based on temporal and cultural contexts and is more likely to dig deep to uncover how the world is recognized and constructed by certain categorical and theoretical element (Barder & Levine, 2012). It highlights the essential aspects of the Lebanese-Syrian nexus is formed in line with their historical and social context. It emphasizes the

structural character of shared ideas, values, and beliefs as constituting ideational and normative structures, which give meaning to material structures.

Therefore, this Constructivist approach will be adapted to analyze the data because the research is interested in the way the Syrian refugees' existence in Lebanon is constructed as a social threat within the Lebanese context.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis:

This thesis includes five chapters in total. Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter examines the theoretical framework to problematize the threat of the Syrian refugees on Lebanese society. This part includes a literature review on threat construction as well as a discussion of Lebanese identity formation and the role of "the Other" in this construction.

Chapter Three provides an expansive discussion of who the Syrian refugees are in Lebanon. It includes a detailed description of the Syrian population, their number, geography, demography, and livelihoods. Chapter four problematizes how Syrians are perceived as threatening to Lebanese society and, on the contrary, how they also add value to Lebanon. This section will study the dynamics between Syrian refugees and the social welfare system, statelessness, and nationalism. Chapter five incorporates the results for the problematized research topic. It attempts to answer the main research question and produce a structured analysis of whether the constructed threat of the constantly increasing Syrian refugees in Lebanon is overstressed or not stressed enough.

The thesis now turns to a more in depth description and analysis of threat construction and the mechanisms through which Syrians are perceived as threats in Lebanon.

Chapter Two

How are Threats Constructed and How Are Syrians

Constructed as Threats in Lebanon?

The dynamics of threat construction and their role in understanding and modeling intra- and inter-communal interactions within the migration context have historically been marginalized as an area of investigation. It is important to understand that something becomes a credible threat through a process that can be described and analyzed. Part of the analysis is realizing that this process is structured by national and human security frameworks. Constructivism is a progressive theoretical framework that addresses the contextual impact combined with the identity of the agents in establishing the relationship (Theys, 2018). Several scholars have studied threat construction using different perspectives and different mixed approaches to lay out an apprehension of the security-migration nexus and securitization of migration (Guler, 2019). Through scrutinizing the identity formation of self and the “other” and its association with the dominant security paradigms adopted by the society as a reaction to mass migration, scholars attempt to understand the interaction processes and the rules standing behind the existing reality. Therefore the next section will endeavor to describe the body of literature that examines how threats are structured, noting that identity construction is a key component.

2.1 What is a threat?

Building a solid comprehension of threat construction is critical to understanding how Syrian refugees are labeled as threatening and dangerous to Lebanon. Threat is understood in different ways.

The non-actor based threat category, which includes non-military threats, were almost absent from security studies until the early 1990s. Ullman (1983) was one of the pioneers in attempting to broaden the concept of threat by emphasizing that limiting analysis of threat to field of battle conveys “a false image of reality”. He argues that threats can be found in a variety of different sectors and social components, including epidemics and migration, and they, too, should be addressed as national security issues.

Despite frequent calls for a theoretical approach that inspects variables from a multilevel and multifaceted perspective (Hudson, 2005), few scientific scholars on policy and security policy analysis actually do so. The unfulfilled need to consider the nexus between the structural factors and the individual actors creates the gap in studies that attempt to explain social threats.

Within security studies, the traditional threats are often dominated by the insights of neorealism (Knudsen, 2001) which led to a lacuna in understanding the non-military and non-state threats. Neorealism theory deems the perception of threat as a function of power asymmetries between groups considering it an objective and external to individuals’ perception (Sjöstedt, 2006). According to Zakaria (1992), a realist approach considers that internal

arrangements and domestic structures are affected by the determining influence of international relation's factors.

Whereas the realist school in general tends to investigate the possible and potential reactions to threat, constructivism brings forth to the center of attention, in addition to the reaction to it, a new breadth of research on the origin of threats and their emergence. Constructivism, in fact, acknowledges the temporal and cultural contexts while realizing the identity of the agents (Jung, 2019). Threat, through the constructivist lens, is recognized as an attack on the identity of the agent which threatens the self (Kratochvil, 2004).

Interestingly enough, Stephan's Walt theory of "balancing of threat" of international relations reveals a common intersection between constructivists and realists through asking questions with virtually identical features (Thies, 2004). I believe understanding the alignment and interaction of both theories provide insights of a potential comprehensive model to examine threat.

On the one hand, Walt's theory "balance of threat" is associated with alliance building through associating with powerful states to ensure protection against potential aggressor states (Walt, 1987). On the other hand, threat is constructed by constructivists as an attempt to sabotage the order, stability, and social status-quo of the self (Newman, 2001). As a result, balancing the threat could be regarded as natural reaction for self-preservation and perpetuating the equilibrium of one's own identity (Kratochovil, 2004). In view of the micro-level politics limited to the state, its internal affairs and the residing conflicting groups and communities, Walt's theory can be deposited in a framework to elucidate threat. In this sense, balancing a threat in

domestic politics may include amplitude of responses to it that are established while respecting the internal structure of the state and its national identity.

David Rousseau (2006) challenges balance of threat theory. He asserts that threat apprehension is not only about the power component but also about “aggressive intentions” suggesting that both play role in threat perception. His intersectional approach voiced an unequivocal need to bring social psychology approaches to political science through highlighting the complementing factors between psychology and constructivist theory. The intersectional approach adopted to examine and understand threat provides a well-rounded theoretical framework that elevates the research results.

Turning to the concept of national security, non-actor based threat approach examines scrutinize not only national but also human security level (Sjostedt, 2011). Human security is defined by the U.N. General Assembly Resolution 66/290 is “an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” It calls for “people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people”. This paradigm calls for two different milestone actions: the remolding of the security concept to a deeper and wider concept and for heeding the everyday security concerns of individuals rather than solely high politics (UNDP, 1994). Yet, human security has been criticized for missing a properly established clarification and a delicate assessment unit (Buzan, 2004). Nevertheless, the multifaceted and evolving conceptualization of human security is significant in understanding the influence of values on state policies and internal conflicting societies.

The human security concept stresses the fact that communal and intercommunal peace and security are directly impacted by the socioeconomic circumstances and human rights standards (Klugman, 1999). Therefore, as Newman (2001) highlights, governments who integrate these factors in their strategy and policy bear their stability building processes within the state and inter-states. Besides, he emphasizes that socioeconomic and human rights standards should be the foundations of a structural conflict prevention strategy that ensures stability and all levels of security especially in diverse communities—it is converting the ethos into policies.

An interesting mixed approach adopted by Scott Watson (2012) turned attention to framing theory and securitization as interconnected frameworks that provide an empirical path to exploring threat and threat construction. He argues (2012) that framing can lay out a spectrum of literatures on under-theorized areas such as “audience acceptance, non-linguistic communities’ forms, empowerment and marginalization, and resistance and desecuritization”. Securitization scholars, indeed, gave special observation to processes that formulated and headed the existing threat to be in the distinctive social context (MacDonald, 2008). Similarly, framing theory is portrayed as “an active procession phenomenon that implies agency and contention...” (Snow & Benford, 2000). Watson (2012) emphasizes that both securitization and framing contemplate audience, communicator, and culture as the basic foundation of meaning construction. The acceptance process by the targeted audience is demonstrated at three different levels which includes personal cognitive, socialization, and public opinion/ dialogue (Entman, 1991).

In view of the audience’s reaction, acceptance and rejection are both potential reactions and opposition may take different shapes and forms. Thus, opposition may be denoted on several

levels, cognitive, socialization, and public opinion/dialogue, and it will be displayed and evidenced in the power relations between the audience and not only potential actors but also potential audiences.

2.2 Identity formation and the “Other”

From the 17th century onwards, the world shifted to a more nation-state form of politics regardless of the impact of globalization and the emergence of regionalism. In fact, citizen identification with a certain nation is a complex multilevel process that is created historically and shaped by several factors. As Fayad (2020) explained, “national identity is not merely defined at the individual level; collective consciousness, state politics, international politics, material interests and historical contingencies all interact to form a national identity”.

Therefore, as is the case with other countries, Lebanese identity development is a dynamic result of the accumulation of different factors and different components that form this heterogonous nation-state.

According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is defined as an imagined political community that is both limited and sovereign. The question is how these imagined schemes transcend and materialize to become a practiced national identity?

Under the occupation of the Ottoman empire, Fakherddine I founded Lebanon—or more specifically, the Mount Lebanon Emirates, during the 16th. Through the years, what became the Governorate of Mount Lebanon changed to have heterogeneous rule in 1861 after a destructive civil war between the Druze and Christians (Fawaz, 1994). In 1918, Lebanon and Syria came under the French mandate after the defeat of the Ottomans in the region,

cementing an era that had seen the rapid increase of the power of Francophone Catholic and Anglophone Protestant missionary schools (Baladi, 2018). In 1920, Greater Lebanon was formed by the French through expanding the territories and boundaries of the previously known as the Governorate of Mount Lebanon. In 1943, Lebanon gained its independence from France and the began its continuous attempts to define itself and forge a common Lebanese identity that combines the aspirations of its diverse groups. The 1943 National Pact formed after independence was, as Farid El Khazen described it, a “communal pact” that does not create a singular national identity but rather fragmented Lebanese national identities. During the stages stated above, affiliated institutions were constantly putting serious effort into nurturing diverging ideological orientations and cultural and political commitments in Lebanon (Ferree, 2012).

Lebanon has progressed from being an autonomous Ottoman component called “Mount Lebanon” to a French colony to an independent nation-state with conflicting groups. The country seems to reflect Jorge Larrain’s logic that “the meaning of national identities is never static or given, but subjected to competing interests and are always, therefore, a terrain of conflict” (1994). Historical Lebanese sectarian and political tensions are manifested in the pluralism of the current Lebanese social and political tensions and conflicts. The heated debate about the imaginary socially constructed identity of Lebanese is in fact a proxy for the ideological conflict about the origin and orientation of Lebanon (Chalabi, 2006). The disagreement ever since has been whether Lebanon is standing in a position in affiliation with its neighboring Arabs or against them.

In fact, this conflict shows the heterogeneity of Lebanese society that combines different cultures, languages, political and social identifications, and ideologies; adding to it the effect of globalization and cosmopolitanism which cause an identity crisis to Lebanese (Baladi, 2018).

This may be called a schizophrenic condition that Lebanese identity is passing through; however, due to the combination of this rich history with such contradicting present factors one can definitely talk about a cosmopolitan Lebanese citizen.

By examining Lebanese society as a multicultural polyglot country resulted from various invasions, educational missionaries, and non-identical ethno-religious groupings, one can conclude that Lebanese lack a cohesive approach for identifying and embracing their multifaceted identity. Amin Maalouf, the renowned Lebanese-French writer argues in his book, *In the Name of Identity* (1998), that Lebanese identity is special due to its diverse components rather than its uniformity. He argues that different ideologies, philosophies, social orientations, and backgrounds can be reconciled to create a vibrant pluralistic identity.

However, through inspecting the reality of Lebanese identity construction on another level, the accumulation of the civil war and the bloody history are still present. During the 15 years of traumatizing destructive war that intensified the Lebanese social polarization and strengthened the fracture among Lebanese groups, the creation of a threatening “sectarian other” was a major consequence (Seidman, 2009). The positive image of the “other” was destroyed and replaced by feelings of hate, fear, and anxiety that inflated the other sectarian groups into dangerous opponents and at the same time created a purified perception of one’s own group which made killing and fighting the other banal (Younes, 2008). Lebanon inherited sectarianism, territorialization, and politicization of the conflicts related to internal or external

issues (Seidman, 2009). Moreover, Lebanon has never been able to secure one of the most crucial factors in Lebanese development which is national belonging which citizens during and post-civil war turned to their sects for safety and survival. Hence, Lebanese collective memory constitutes of fragmented national identity, politicized public space, and fears of the different “other”.

In fact, the manifestation of political sectarianism divides urban spaces in Lebanon through producing public and political landscapes using visual means and political violence (Monroe, 2016). These dynamics are not limited to spaces but also to governmental institutions. The state welfare system is mediated by sectarian parties that operate at the “margins of the state” (Das & Poole, 2004). This blurs the line between public and private in Lebanon which allows the practice of structural violence through governmental institutions that fuel the hyper-politicization of the welfare system and stratify division and inequality (Cammett, 2015).

Weakening the state social services system for the benefit of sectarian parties consolidates the sectarian power-sharing political system and preserves the fragmented social and political Lebanese community and “the dangerous other” formula.

Lebanese identity is constantly created and restructured based on internal and external circumstances and events that draw the frame of this multilevel identity. Complex dynamics are always navigating in the Lebanese context that formulate the reality of the identification process. Albeit the fact that Lebanese citizens and most foreigners residing in Lebanon share a certain spectrum of cultural and social characteristics, social identity is articulated through differentiation with respect to others (Bourdieu, 1979). Therefore, the struggle with the other will regularly be present and will differ in terms of intensity depending on the framings.

Eventually the identity building struggle is critically shaped by existing politics over capital as well as socio-economic class dynamics. The representation and identification are also containing power dynamics and power distribution in society (Westin & Bastos, 2010). Identity construction entails two actors. "Selfing" and "Othering" are processes used to classify individuals and groups by claiming to a collective identity that individuals and communities are strongly committed and precluding the integration of others (Baumann, 2004). Furthermore, the other is also determined by employing segmenting strategies by using belonging place, race, language and social or linguistic categories that could be considered as an index of shared identity; these categorizations can be used independently and dependently to deploy "the other" classification (Rooij, 2013). Baumann (2004) takes the discussion further by arguing that this process is abided by what he called Orientalism, the reversed version of mirroring. Here, the recognition process of the self and the other is based on identifying the opposite values. Moving forward, this identification process among groups with contradicting values emphasizes the differences and increases the possibility of building negative perceptions and attitudes. In fact, the attitudinal presentations are based on a two-fold system: the implicit system that attributes the automatic ingrained representations; and explicit system that is demonstrate by the managed and intended attitudes. The former system includes the subconscious notions that control and guide identification processes of the self and the other such as history and collective memory. Whereas the latter system is the tool used to conceptualize a specific view and thought through manipulating knowledge, history, and experiences. At the community level, it aims to structure directed awareness about a group or issue. In the Lebanese context, both systems are applicable on and used by internal forces, foreign powers, and community

agents to shape Lebanese policies and leading the masses as a mean to achieve political agendas. This dual approach is dominating the attitudes and action-based perceptions of Lebanese national “to others”.

Combining the potential for building a negative impression and eventually communal social attitudes with the refuge situation would escalate the prospect of forming a hostile and aggressive dynamics with the refuge community. Initially, perceptions toward refugees are accompanied with notions of threat and fear of the different individuals and its unknown impact on the determined status quo. The stance toward refugees is usually characterized by rejection, isolation, and discrimination based on different specific qualities such as culture and religion that are subjected to change over time (Mantarove, 2019).

Thus, the case of the Syrian refugee in Lebanon, in fact, is extremely critical and sensitive due to different and intertwined factors. History, international interests, ideological differences, strategic and regime variances, civil war, Syrian war, and internal political structures are contributing reasons to the particularity of the Syrian refugees hosted in Lebanon. The complexity of the conditions controlling any Lebanese-Syrian interaction affects the experience of Syrians fleeing security in Lebanon due to the processes guiding the Lebanese self-identity and “the other” formation. The extensive spread of the Syrian refugee crisis’ influence on different levels including internal and external politics, social, economic, cultural, sectarian, and institutional, makes the Syrian-Lebanese interaction highly exposed to a wide spectrum of potential options.

The controlling factors of the Syrian-Lebanese interaction produce an inclusion-exclusion system of the Lebanese community that can be recognized as a “temperamental” system. It

generates a volatile structure that includes procedures based on un-equivalent and biased standards. These standards separate cultures, nationalities, classes, religions, political parties, geographical areas and other classifications into different categories and assign them different roles and values. These assumptions and what could be called “judgments” are mental schemas that are produced as part of the differentiation system. It directs the inclusion-exclusion system and decides its constituents. This in fact explains the contradictory nature of the Lebanese identity and the double-standard system while dealing with refugees and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals. Therefore, accepting and tolerating “the other” by Lebanese nationals is not based on common and shared measures but rather is manipulated and steered according to several constructed considerations.

This contradictory system increases the potential of spreading inequality, racism, and conflict among Lebanese society. It affects and gets affected by the politics controlling these relationships. The relationship between the Syrian and Lebanese communities in Lebanon is definitely an interesting illustration of the above. Their interaction is shaped by the politics controlling the relationship between Syrian refugees and Lebanese nationals and between Syrians and Lebanese in general. At the same time, the interaction between Syrian refugees in Lebanon and nationals affects the internal and external politics of the Syrian-Lebanese linkage. As a result, the Lebanese inclusion-exclusion system is a non-consistent biased system that classifies various groups based on different standardized structures. Furthermore, even though this system is a common structured system in Lebanon, however, major differences could be noticed among different heterogenic Lebanese groups while using it.

In conclusion, threat and identity construction are interconnected theories that help establish a well-rounded picture regarding the perceptions directed towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon. To go further, the Syrian population in Lebanon has its own characteristics and dimensions that contribute to the structuring processes of Lebanese perceptions.

Chapter Three

Demographics of the Syrian Population in Lebanon and Their Experience in the Country

In 2011, Syria started experiencing massive protests all around the country in opposition to the regime. Unfortunately, these protests soon turned into a “full-scale civil war” which resulted in “over 12 million Syrians” fleeing their homeland to seek refuge in nearby countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (Immenkamp, 2017). According to the UN, since refugees are people who are forced to leave their country because of political and military reasons, Syrians who were forced to abandon their land and homes were considered refugees as of March 2011 (LCRP, 2019). These people sought protection from other countries and are still suffering from their refugee status. Therefore, Syrian refugees can be described using certain contexts including their demographics, housings, employments, education and last but not least health. Generally speaking, a Syrian refugee in Lebanon is someone who fled from the war in Syria to Lebanon. Such a person is vulnerable and dependent on Lebanese resources to survive. They are usually perceived in a negative way rather than as a potentially beneficial actor in Lebanese society. Interestingly, a migrant—unlike a refugee—is someone who may be recognized in a more positive way as they can be considered a productive component rather than a dependent.

A large number of Syrians seeking refuge found Lebanon to be the nearest exit to their misery. Amidst the 2011 crisis, “up to 1.5 million displaced persons are believed to have crossed the border into Lebanon” and their displacement caused a 30% rise of the total Lebanese population (Immenkamp, 2017). This sudden influx of displaced Syrians turned Lebanon into the country that holds the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world (Immenkamp, 2017). Syrian refugees went through an enormous amount of struggle and it has still not ended. They were forced to leave their homes and lose their money, land and family. Searching for a haven was their priority and Lebanon was strategically and geographically the most reasonable choice. However, the Lebanese government and territory were not prepared for such a sudden change in the country’s demography. In fact, up until this day, the Lebanese government considers Syrian refugees as being “temporarily misplaced” thus they are supposedly expected to return to their homeland (Immenkamp, 2017). Unfortunately, Syrian refugees are still unable to return to their country because of several harsh factors some of which are the loss of everything they own there, the fact that they can no longer support themselves, and that they are scared because they will be at risk. The only available option for them is to stay on Lebanese territory even though the conditions are often terrible.

In order to put the situation in a more concrete context, it is necessary to discuss a few numbers and other aspects of the refugee influx that have been negatively affecting Lebanon as a hosting country. A typical Syrian refugee household in Lebanon is comprised of an average of 6.1 individuals, which are usually formed of the nuclear family with extended family members (LCSR, 2013). The extended members of the families are approximately 21% of the family members counted in every household which increases the number of individuals per household

to 6.5 (LCSR, 2013). In fact, the percentages differ from one area to another due to factors such as the origin area of the refugees and their awareness and educational level or the area that they reside in in the receiving country and the socioeconomic environment dominating it. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that the average of the number of the Syrian family members is 5.1 persons (Syrian Statistical Abstract, 2011). Upon critical scrutiny, these numbers exhibit a key problems in the Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon: a high birth rate combined with a high poverty rate.

The Syrian refugee population in Lebanon is younger than the Lebanese population. The median of age of the Syrian refugee population is 17.5 years. The percentage of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon between 15 years and 59 is 54.7%. In fact, the proportional structure of the Syrian population in Lebanon differs from the structure of the Syrian population in Syrian, where their median age is 21. This conveys that the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon is comprised very young communities that on one hand have the potential to be productive and independent; on another hand, this population group needs resources, education, and employment to play a positive role or else could be easily manipulated by malevolent actors.

Regarding the gender of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon, unlike the gender structure in Syria before the crisis, 52.4% of the refugees are female and less than 50% of them are girls under the age of 20 (LCSR, 2013). This could be an indicator of the high rate of child marriage that opens for the opportunity of pregnancy at young age and increases the tendency of raising large young family. An interesting fact is that 20% of the Syrian households are headed by

women which reveal the potential of a certain shift in the gender roles in the future for women in Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon.

A significant demographic characteristic is the birthrate. There is a major gap in the demographic data of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In 2013, the birthrate among Syrian refugees was 19 per thousand per year (LCSR, 2013). Taking into consideration that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are estimated to be around 1.5 million, the early marriage phenomena and child pregnancy, and what is estimated to be a high number of unregistered refugees and newborns, there is a high probability of a positive momentum growth accompanied with an increase of stateless refugees.

The refugees who fled from Syria to Lebanon were not only Syrian. According to UNRWA (2013), around 47,000 Palestinian refugees residing Syria fled to Lebanon after the inflammation of the war in Syria. Their situation is definitely more complicated than ever in Lebanon due to the political complexity of the Palestinian refugee case in Lebanon.

Moreover, Syrian refugees in general are living in harsh economic circumstances. In 2019, the Syrian 55% of the Syrian refugees were in extreme poverty, a percentage that increased to 90% in 2021 due to mainly the elevated Lebanese crisis (Karasapan & Shah, 2021). Syrian refugee families are considered deprived their basic needs including water, food, sanitation, shelter, health and education services (Karasapan & Shah, 2021). These households are now living in less than the minimum monthly wage of the Lebanese (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2020). Food insecurity and coping mechanisms have been diminishing in Syrian refugees households (VASyR, 2020) which increase their potential to get involved in extremism acts and terrorist waves.

The results of studies on Syrian refugees' number and demographics are not always similar. Some investigators and intuitions have no ability or no intention to reach and announce the accurate numbers in Lebanon. According to studies conducted by the Lebanese government in 2018, there are around 1.5 million Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon and this number includes "950,334 registered as refugees with UNHCR, of which 25.2% are women, 19.4% men, 27.1% are girls, 28.3% are boys with diverse backgrounds and specific needs" (LCRP, 2019). To believe that these people are physically, psychologically and emotionally safer is a little too optimistic since 70% of Syrian refugees have been living below the poverty line ever since they were forced to move to Lebanon (Immenkamp, 2017). Moreover, a large portion of these people have no physical shelter or houses to live in and they are not even given the opportunity to live in camps. Until this day, there are no formal camps established by the Lebanese government in order to offer the least form of shelter to these Syrian refugees because the country has previously been hosting Palestinian refugees for far longer now (Yassin, 2019). Not all Syrian refugees had lost everything after being displaced, yet even the ones who were trying to financially support themselves found it unaffordable to shelter themselves and their families. The latter happened for various reasons but the most common ones were being evicted, not having enough money to settle the rent fees and the unacceptable rising prices of rent in general (Yassin, 2019). In parallel, other refugees tried to benefit from any livable space offered to them but they ended up residing in overcrowded places, unhygienic environment and very poorly maintained shelters. The data collected from research and studies show that refugees who rent a certain space face various problems, one of which is lack of vital spaces such as toilets and kitchens (UNHCR, n.d.). Refugees living in similar highly poor conditions

consist 35% of the total Syrian refugee number as shown in 2018 statistics (Yassin, 2019). In addition, almost a third of Syrian refugees share their basic accommodations with other families or refugees, and approximately 18% have been living in brittle temporary tents they have spontaneously set themselves in unmarked zones (UNHCR, n.d.). As for the remaining 9%, they turn “non-residential structures including garages, shops, worksites, and farm buildings” into so-called homes (UNHCR, n.d.).

In an attempt to help Syrian refugees as well as to protect the Lebanese, the Lebanese government – more specifically the Ministry of Social Affairs – along with the help of UN-Habitat and the UNHCR, set up a plan in order to offer their support concerning habitation (UNHCR, n.d.). Starting October 2018, the Shelter Sector was funded at 17% (LCRP, 2019). Over 202,000 individuals received assistance by this sector and they were divided as follows; “96% are displaced Syrians, 3% vulnerable Lebanese and 1% Palestinian refugees”, thus sector partners targeted the most vulnerable and those in need of immediate help (LCRP, 2019). In September 2018, nearly 108,095 displaced Syrian refugees profited from humanitarian aid and support for the sole purpose of upholding their temporary shelters at healthier and more habitable conditions (LCRP, 2019). The interventions included many rehabilitations of existing structures as well as constructions in both rural and urban areas. In addition, temporary shelter material was provided to refugees residing in “informal tented settlements”, as well as improvements and preventive measures related to fire, weatherproofing, flooding and hygiene (UNHCR, n.d.). When it comes to eviction cases, more serious laws were reinforced and highlighted such as “written rent agreement, occupancy free of charge, [and] rent freeze for an agreed upon period” (LCRP, 2019). Nevertheless, the Shelter Sector funds have been decreasing

since 2019 and, as a result to that, Syrian refugees have been forced to move to worse habitation conditions and more unsafe and unhealthy types of shelter (Yassin, 2019).

In addition to the shelter crisis, it is natural that more struggles have emerged, especially when it comes to nutrition and water resources. After having assessed the environmental impact of the influx of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2014, the report done by the Ministry of Environment shed light on “an increase in water and soil contamination directly affecting the quality of agricultural produce” (LCRP, 2019). The major problem was, and still is, that the Lebanese food production sector has already been unable to meet the demands of local food consumption; therefore, the sudden increase of population became an additional burden. However, in 2018, the entire food consumption situation was marginally improved at a national level, not exclusively for refugees, with a noticeable decrease of 2% in the “households with low dietary diversity” section (VASyR, 2018).

After having re-assessed the food crisis in 2019, the Lebanese government made more efforts when it comes to further raising food production, preservation and consumption awareness (LCRP, 2019). Moreover, the government pushed for more strategic decisions concerning agriculture sustainability and implementation of climate-smart strategies in order to avoid any further water and/or soil contamination (LCRP, 2019). In an additional attempt to help refugees make ends meet, the government also introduced the concept of cash assistance via e-cards which help refugees receive enough money donated by NGOs, individuals or organizations (VASyR, 2018). The e-cards also helped with the money management strategy in hope of catering to the vital needs of every e-card holder, depending on the number of family members and their financial situation along with other factors (VASyR, 2018). Another introduced

concept was the in-kind assistance which includes many goods and services assistance ranging from food and hygienic products procurement to legal services (VASyR, 2018).

These two important strategies have not been accessed by all refugees, especially the high number of families who do not have a male provider, and subsequently miss out on some aid. It is no surprise that many households are being headed by women. Unfortunately, these households receive less assistance and show lower dietary diversity and consumption due to numerous reasons such as lack of work opportunities and security (LCRP, 2019). According to Nasser Yassin (2019), female-headed families are the most vulnerable and they often have less access to assistance and services compared to male-headed households. This is partially due to the fact that they cannot leave their family members, especially toddlers and children, alone in order to find job opportunities, and the fact that some of these women did not receive the educational level required to even have the opportunity – which has sadly become a luxury – to consider applying to any job in the first place. In fact, the unemployment rate of female caretakers is estimated at 61% compared to 35% of men caretakers (VASyR, 2018). Beside their lower ability of securing jobs to improve their income, female refugees, more specifically girls aged between 15 and 19 years old, are encouraged to get married as soon as they can so that they escape their current financial situation (VASyR, 2018).

In parallel with the food crisis, Syrian refugees have also been suffering from shortages of water supplies as well as total or partial lack of hygienic products. Prior to the influx of refugees, Lebanon had already been struggling with its water sector. According to a LCRP report (2019), “after seven years of bearing the unparalleled impact of the Syria crisis, preceded by decades of under-investment and civil war, the water and wastewater service systems are in a state of

severe disrepair". When it comes to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), reports in 2017 indicate some improvement related to household access to clean water and general hygiene (VASyR, 2018). However, the majority of the refugees questioned stated that they highly rely on bottled water and this means more money is being spent to have access to drinkable water (VASyR, 2018). In response to the WASH crisis, many projects have been adopted, specifically the ones concerning hygiene promotion and awareness, yet these projects should be expanded to insure more awareness and secure better outcomes (LCRP, 2019). As discussed so far, a large number of Syrian refugees are struggling with food insecurity as well as lack of water and hygienic supplies and resources. More food production and sustainability should be put into perspective, otherwise, the agricultural sector will be severely damaged and food provisions will witness an unprecedented shortage on a national level.

Despite all the assistance and projects suggested and implemented, most Syrian refugees continue to be highly dependent on food and water assistance since "only 10% of displaced Syrians are food secure and almost 90% depend on some form of coping strategy to meet their food needs" (LCRP, 2019). The latter is mainly due to insufficient income ratios because of low wages and/or limited job opportunities available for refugees (LCRP, 2019). The fact that these refugees are often unskilled and most probably uneducated leads them to usually find themselves working informally, especially in low-productivity sectors, thus reducing their chances of receiving higher income (Errighi & Griesse, 2016). In comparison with the Lebanese, Syrian refugees face a far higher rate of unemployment, especially that Lebanon had already started witnessing financial crisis prior to the refugee influx (Immenkamp, 2017).

As for the Syrian refugees who end up filling job vacancies, they face problems on other levels. Almost 80% of them are usually paid less than the normal wage (Anera, 2020). In order to partially solve this problem, neighboring countries like Jordan and Turkey decided to collaborate by opening their labor markets to these refugees as well as increasing the creation of new job positions for Jordanians and Turks (Immenkamp, 2017). However, the Lebanese government was extremely clear about not being “a country of asylum, nor a final destination for refugees” since it is already a struggling country itself (Immenkamp, 2017). Recently, the employment sector has been going through rough times with the global pandemic that hit the entire world in 2020. Unfortunately, Syrian refugees have been suffering from terrible consequences prior to the pandemic as they were exposed to “hazardous work, job irregularity, and even arrest and detainment” (ILO, 2020). The majority of Syrian refugees are working with no valid work permits, 60% of them have been permanently laid off their job positions, and 31% have been temporarily put on hold due to the rules imposed by the government during the pandemic (ILO, 2020).

Unfortunately, men are not the only ones concerned when it comes to labor. Children, as well as women, have also been sharing the same fate. Refugee children and women are often obliged to search for job opportunities regardless of their age and abilities. This goes back to the fact that in Lebanon, and as of 2018, almost 81% of the registered Syrian refugees were women and children (Yassin, 2019). However, only about 16% of the registered women refugees are effectively working and it is even more challenging for the women who are the heads of their families (LCRP, 2019) as noted earlier. In parallel, children have been going through an immense amount of pressure by their dire daily routine.

According to a survey, up to 4.8% of refugee children have been working since they settled in Lebanon (Yassin, 2019). As much as this percentage sounds relatively low, it is quite a dangerous number since children are not physically, mentally or psychologically equipped to delve into the labor sector. There are several factors behind this percentage and the most stagnant ones are complete or partial lack of income within the household, inaccessible education, and critical influential environment (Yassin, 2019). When the refugee families are not receiving enough financial aid, the obvious solution for them is to search for any job that can offer them more sustainability. It is therefore the only additional resource they can rely on thus a larger number of working family members automatically leads to more income.

According to the Human Rights Watch (2016), families who receive consistent financial help are more likely to send their children to school on a regular basis even if some of these children have to work in parallel as well. Nevertheless, families heavily rely on at least one working child since it is much easier for these children to find small daily jobs obviously because they get paid less (HRW, 2016). Not being fully protected by the law, refugee children receive lower salaries and, most of the time, employers exploit these young people by either reducing the salaries even further or by delaying the payment date agreed upon (HWR, 2016).

It seems like it is not enough for refugee children to be living away from their home country, to lose a huge part of their childhood, and to make extraordinary adjustments at a very young age. These children spend their time roaming the roads, searching for any kind of job, begging passengers to give them money or food, and waiting for a miracle that would end their misery. When the crisis in Syria started and refugees fled to Lebanon, adjustments had to be made especially concerning the youth. As the number of refugee children and adolescents began to

grow by the end of 2013, the Lebanese government opened more opportunities for refugee children to have access to formal education by encouraging them to enroll in public schools – around 88 of them – in order to attend afternoon shifts, whereas some of these schools also offered morning shifts if the capacity allowed them to do so (HRW, 2016). Unfortunately, in 2017, more than 50% of refugee teenagers and young adults did not have access to proper education (UNHCR, n.d.). The problem stretches even further because “while Syrian refugee youths are legally entitled to attend Lebanon’s public schools, they face formidable barriers, from a different language of instruction to having to work to support their families” (Anera, 2020). Torn between having to secure a steady income to support the family and receiving the right education but also having to do an enormous effort to catch up with another school system, the refugee children often end up either dropping out or not attending school in the first place (HRW, 2016).

In an attempt to rescue the refugee children’s educational level and have them back on track, many NGOs have been working on finding solutions in order to help these children recover the material they have missed and push them to reach their full educational potential. For instance, the UNHCR (n.d.) has been working on tracking “out-of-school” refugee children to sponsor them to either go back to school or be able to enroll in one. It has also worked on expanding and rehabilitating up to 24 schools by 2017 so that more children could have access to formal education (UNHCR, n.d.). Furthermore, it launched a program under the name of Foreign Language Groups, in which refugee children learn French and English for them to be more comfortable communicating in class (UNHCR, n.d.). Anera (2020) is another NGO worth mentioning since they also provide help when refugee children are in need. Not only they

redirect children back to school, but they also offer them additional support in many school subjects in order to increase their chances of applying to decent jobs and receiving good income in the future (Anera, 2020). In addition, the donations they receive fund many projects, not exclusively related to education, and they include sectors like environment, water and sanitation, as well as health (Anera, 2020).

When it comes to the health of Syrian refugees and the Lebanese health sector, the latter has been the most adept of all the sectors mentioned so far in meeting at least some of the needs of the transplanted Syrians. It quickly adapted to the influx crisis and remained functional in all of its aspects “while maintaining achievements” (Ammar et al., 2016). As discussed earlier in the chapter, the Syrian refugee population is considered to be fairly young since 57% of the registered refugees are between 0 and 18 years old, 23% are teenagers and 17% are young adults (LCRP, 2019). Through major collaborations between the Lebanese government and NGOs, a support system – National School Health Programme – was created for the refugee adolescent and youth’s health, shedding light on three main criteria: “medical screening, health awareness and education, and healthy school environments” (LCRP, 2019).

Another noticeable number among the Syrian refugee population is the percentage of people with specific needs. These needs range among the following: “child at risk, disability, older person at risk, family separation, specific legal and physical protection needs, unaccompanied or separated child, serious medical condition, single parent, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), torture survivor, woman at risk” (Yassin, 2019). Towards the end of 2017, 80% of the Syrian refugee families residing in Lebanon had a minimum of one family member with specific

needs, and this percentage turned out to be the highest among other hosting countries (Yassin, 2019).

The Lebanese government received crucial support from the public and private sectors, several partners within the health field whether they were national or international, as well as NGOs, and was able to help a large number of Syrian refugees by setting a well-organized plan in response to the crisis (Ammar et al., 2016). Therefore, the major feature of Lebanon's health sector resilience is its achievement of integration and smart financial dependency (Ammar et al., 2016). In addition, almost half of the Syrian refugees registered in 2018 reported having a minimum of one family member in need of primary health care and, fortunately, up to 87% of these families reported having well received the medical help they needed (Yassin, 2019). As for the remaining families, they reported not having received the medical care required due to several factors some of which are the expensive cost of treatment, the inaccessibility to cheaper means of transport, and the failure to secure the right amount of money as deposit for hospitals (Yassin, 2019). Furthermore, young girls and women reported not having enough access or having no access at all to gynecologic-health-seeking behaviors (LCRP, 2019). Moreover, since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, the Lebanese as well as the Syrian refugees have been under immense pressure because of the country's state of emergency alongside the country's worst financial crisis in years (ILO 2020). Both populations are struggling on all levels especially with the increasing rate of unemployment and number of closed businesses.

In conclusion, Syrian refugees have been going through many hardships regardless of their age, gender, and educational level. Their lives turned upside down and they are unable to go back

safely to their home country up until this day. They had lost their own homes, their properties and, most importantly, their dignity. It has been almost ten years now that they have fled their country, searching for asylum. Nonetheless, a large number of them have not truly found any peace; on the contrary, they have been tormented, tortured and abandoned, as if their losses were not enough. The majority wishes to return to Syria, whether they had to be alone, accompanied by their partner or by family members. Being displaced and forced to live away from home leads to a dangerous state of mind; this is statelessness. The thesis now turns to comprehend how Syrians are perceived by the Lebanese state and politicians. The situation in Lebanon reflects a huge dilemma among intra-communal and inter-communal communities.

Chapter Four

Syrians as Threats and Syrians Adding Value—Lebanese Schizophrenia regarding the Syrian Presence in Lebanon

Syrian refugees have a binary influence on the Lebanese system. They have augmented some sectors and aspects whereas at the same time pressured the welfare infrastructure that already suffers from fragility, shortcomings, and fragmentation. The mass Syrian population has several implications on statelessness, poverty, employability and expands to reach the whole social economic and political aspects. This chapter will lay out the Lebanese perception of the positive and negative impacts of the Syrian refugees. Moreover, it will debate the different notions and interactions of the Lebanese public and politicians to the refugees residing in Lebanon.

To be stateless is to live with no specific nationality or country recognition and this means that stateless people do not have limited civil rights, or rights in general, in the countries they end up residing in. In Lebanon, there are different groups of stateless residents and they make up a good minority of the Lebanese population. A large number of Syrians fled their country in 2011 because of the war in their homeland and the result was displacement as well as statelessness. More than 1.5 million Syrians have been fleeing to Lebanon since then, and the numbers are in continuous increase. What turns these suddenly-displaced people stateless is the fact that a

large number of them have lost their identity documentation while they were seeking refuge in Lebanon, thus they found themselves lacking any official or nationality documents (Fried, 2019). The problem extends further every single year since the majority of these people have been residing on Lebanese grounds long enough to have newborns. Giving birth to a child in Lebanon while being stateless means the parents have to go through a very long process in order to register their newborn and thus give the latter identity and nationality (Fried, 2019). The process not only takes too long to be accomplished, but it is also costly, requires transport, and parents must have their own identification or registration documents to ultimately wrap up the registration at the foreign ministry and the Syrian embassy (Fried, 2019).

Furthermore, some of the poor families are not familiar with the entire procedure of registration and this causes the child to be born stateless (Fried, 2019). Parents are therefore stranded between two choices: leave the child stateless since they cannot register it as Lebanese or even Syrian, or flee back to Syria and take huge risks without having any guarantees that their child will be officially registered as Syrian (Fried, 2019). The complications are real; the Lebanese government has also made it more challenging and difficult for Syrian refugees to renew their residency permits. The Syrian refugees are therefore left with no clear identity and are not given easier platforms or ways to receive or renew their permits. For instance, Syrian refugees must have either a Lebanese sponsor or a valid reason for residency, such as work, education or health-related issues (Immenkamp, 2017). The number of refugees who do not hold legal permits has been insanely increasing over the years (Immenkamp, 2017). This negatively affects them because they can no longer find and land legitimate job vacancies since they are frightened of being caught by the authorities (Immenkamp, 2017).

The refugee situation takes a quite negative psychological toll on the refugee children who feel they are “invisible, alien, living in a shadow, like a street dog and worthless” in seven different countries in which they reside (UNHCR, 2015). This is exacerbated by statelessness. In fact, António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, discusses the serious psychological damage statelessness can have on young refugees (UNHCR, 2015). Being a stateless child has many negative repercussions and decreases these children’s opportunity to get them the education they need, whether it was at school or at university, in order to be more eligible when applying to decent job vacancies. Unfortunately, stateless children and teenagers are often harassed, exploited and discriminated against by both the authorities and society (UNHCR, 2015).

The fact that Syrian refugees become or are born stateless is also due to the lack of reasonable and feasible mechanisms to help them hold on to their nationality (Albarazi & Waas, 2016). The latter is crucial because when these refugees stay away from their homeland for that long while others are born in exile and remain there, maintaining proof of their nationality becomes exasperating (Albarazi & Waas, 2016).

As a consequence of the above, statelessness can be a major social and political de-stabilizing cause to the country. This phenomenon is highly correlated with “large-scale” and “long-term” security concerns (Didle, 2016). Radicalization and extremism are considered spillover effects on stateless individuals and Lebanon is in a very risky and precarious situation regarding this issue (U.S. Department of State, 2015). In fact, in Lebanon, Palestinian refugee camps are crucial example. The camps are contemplated as a secure host for armed groups who were involved throughout the years in several armed conflicts in Lebanon at different stages and who

operate from Lebanon (ICG, 2009). The Syrian refugee case is a concern for several interlocutors to be invested in in order to achieve different agendas (U.S. Department of State, 2015).

Being a country that has hosted 1.5 million people escaping the conflict in Syria with 440,000 new comers in 2014 alone is a huge turning point that needs combined international efforts. Aside from the estimated of hundreds of thousands of unregistered refugees (UN, 2014), and since the end of 2014, more than one in each four people is a de facto Syrian refugee or a Palestinian refugee (UNHCR, 2015). In a state of nearly four million national, almost quarter of their number are refugees settling in the country and getting partially supported by its institutions. Moreover, urban densification is expected to increase by one-third with a population density increasing from 400 to 520 persons per square kilometer-(UN, 2014).

Besides, being a country that hosts a quite big numbers of refugees – not only Syrian refugees, this put it under pressure on many levels. Since these refugees have fled their country and the majority of them have lost everything, they add financial pressure to the hosting country because they are poor and thus need more care, especially financial aid. The obvious first threat then is homelessness or difficulties to find affordable habitable spaces. Approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees are concentrated in almost 251 different areas and with the increase of population, there is a natural rise in the basic needs – starting with convenient places to live and reside in – that the hosting country is incapable of offering (Immenkamp, 2017). Naturally, this situation will lead to “social tensions that could develop into significant communal violence”, especially that some local residents will consider refugees as intruders more than as people who need genuine and urgent help (Immenkamp, 2017). The sudden concentration of

Syrian refugees in these many areas has also led to the decrease of general investment, tourism, as well as construction projects in the localities; therefore, the security and well-being of both locals and refugees must improve in order to encourage investors, tourists and constructors to be back on track (Immenkamp, 2017).

Moreover, according to the UNHCR, the growing number of Syrian refugees fleeing to Lebanon over the years has been adding to the already-existing economic burden on the country as a whole (Enab Baladi, 2017). The Lebanese government is already aware that it cannot keep supporting refugees and cater to their needs especially that they consist the quarter of the Lebanese population (Enab Baladi, 2017). What elevates the situation is that Syrian refugees largely don't contribute to the economic cycle due to their lack of liquidity and lack of capability to contribute to the macro-economy. In 2020, the majority of the Syrian refugee population – almost 89% of them – is living under the extreme poverty line (OCHA, 2020). It is also worth mentioning that during this year, the global pandemic, alongside the explosion in Beirut and the insane inflation, have eventually led to even more poverty and accumulation of debt (OCHA, 2020). The major reasons behind the latter are to secure food, rent and medication, although almost half of the Syrian refugees have been struggling with food insecurity in 2020 in comparison to only 28% surveyed during the same time one year ago (WFP, 2020). Furthermore, the refugee influx has been draining the Lebanese government's resources and infrastructure by making Lebanon the eighth country with the largest debt in the world “with 147% of GDP” (Immenkamp, 2017).

Another perceived “threat” in Lebanon is the increasing rate of unemployment and the unavailability of suitable job opportunities for Syrian refugees. The latter face major

employment issues due to the fact that they are either low-skilled or semi-skilled workers, mainly knowledgeable about agricultural, constructional and domestic kinds of job fields (Immenkamp, 2017). What makes it worse for them is that, once employed, they are not included in any social security system, they receive salaries below the minimum wage range and they are threatened to lose their jobs very frequently (Immenkamp, 2017). Furthermore, the existence of laws protecting against the entry of foreigners into a number of professions means that, even for more educated Syrians, unemployment is much more likely than not.

In general, refugees cope with the unemployment situation by adopting extreme strategies such as marrying their children or withdrawing them from school, limiting their expenses on health and medication, begging on the streets, and taking on very risky jobs to secure more income (OCHA, 2020). As of 2020, and with the devastating consequences of the pandemic, Syrian refugees currently find themselves in competition with many Lebanese who have recently lost their jobs due to several businesses shutting down (Mhaissen, 2020). Since they are all competing to get hired by being paid less, the income of various Syrian refugee families has dramatically dropped and some no longer have one (Mhaissen, 2020). According to a survey done by the Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) between 30th March and 15th April, 2020, “85% of Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian refugees (200 out of 234 respondents) had lost income as a consequence of COVID-19 response measures, with this loss having an equal impact on all areas of Lebanon” (Mhaissen, 2020). In addition, the low income workers caused expansion of the informal sector and the decreasing of the wages which directly affected national’s access to livelihood and their stability (ILO, 2014).

Adding to the equation, a large number of Syrian refugees are struggling with homelessness. They are in urgent need of having a roof over their heads yet they cannot afford the increasing rent fees or do not have the legal documentations that could help them land a more decent space. First of all, Lebanon lacks of camps for Syrians seeking shelter thus these people had to settle down in different Lebanese neighborhoods, some of which are extremely deprived in the first place like the Beqa'a Valley and other Lebanese areas in the north (Immenkamp, 2017). Most of the spaces have been randomly acquired by Syrian refugees and the majority of them have been living in fragile tents or settlements with their families. Harsh natural conditions such as cold weather, poor ventilation, humidity and dampness lead to poorer general health, specifically diseases and infections related to the respiratory system (Habib et al., 2019). In addition, studies show a close link between refugees' well-being and their neighborhood since "children who lived in households that reported feeling unhappy with the neighborhood experienced poorer health across the board" (Habib et al., 2019). This in fact resulted in the spread of chaotic residential areas for Syrian refugees across Lebanon, the increased pressure on the accommodation sector, and the increase of rental cost that influenced the low income nationals (Cherri, Gonzalez & Delgado, 2016). This situation escalates the pressure on the health care system to respond to the unhealthy and inhumane resident situation of the refugees (Coutts, Fouad & Batniji, 2013).

When it comes to refugees' health and safety, they desperately need medical attention especially during the phase when Syria was in the middle of the war. The Lebanese government has been trying to aid them by taking several measures towards solving this humane need. For instance, Doctors Without Borders and other NGOs created centers at multiple Lebanese

hospitals to offer medical help (Mhaissen, 2020). Nevertheless, a large number of refugees could not benefit from these services simply because they were frightened they do not hold valid permits and official documentation (Mhaissen, 2020). Although there has been shortage in funding the health sector in Lebanon, hospitals and medical centers have always attended to the refugees' health-related needs. However, the constraints of financial aid is and will be affecting the health sector in general leading to probable lower quality in health services and more expenses to be spent, not only for refugees but the Lebanese in general as well (Yassin, 2019). Moreover, it has been noticed an increase in the tuberculosis rates since the beginning of the crisis (Cousins, 2015) adding to it the struggle to provide the needed staff, equipment (Holmes, 2014), and medication (El Jardali, Hammoud, Fouad, & Bou Karroum, 2014).

Consequently, nationals' access to primary health care decreased due to the degrading quality of care, overcrowding, and increased waiting time (El Jardali, Hammoud, Fouad, Bou Karroum, 2014).

Moreover, the pandemic has not been of immense help to the health sector either, especially after the explosion in Beirut. With the on-going pandemic crisis, many Syrian refugees have been facing limitations and shortage in medical help in addition to feeling less safe as well as not having enough income to cover their basic food-intake needs (Mhaissen, 2020). This national state of emergency has been forcing the Lebanese in general and the Syrian refugees to go through many losses including lack of adequate health services and education, starvation, deprivation, and insecurity (Mhaissen, 2020).

Another side effect of being stateless is the risk of not receiving proper education and not having access to school or basic education rights. Refugee children often find themselves

obliged to help their families with the income at very young ages. The number of young children engaged in child labor is increasing at high rates and it has doubled up to 4.4% in 2020 (OCHA, 2020). According to research, young boys are usually more encouraged to be working and consist of almost 6.9% of refugee children (OCHA, 2020). A considerable number of Syrian refugee children could not have access to educational institutions due to lack of identity documentations, invalid residency permits and lack of financial funds. During the pandemic, the majority of refugee children are currently unable to continue their educational journey due to lack of internet connection and/or proper electronic devices to attend their online classes (OCHA, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, up to 78% of attending refugee children reported having experienced one form of violent discipline at the least (Yassin, 2019). Since basic social services are not available to defend these children against this kind of abuse, they feel weak and unprotected.

More work and effort have been done in the Protection Sector related to the LCRP to secure a safer environment to these children and to their families (Yassin, 2019). The plan includes involving partners in the Education Sector to encourage children especially teenagers to remain at school and refrain from dropping out, as well as developing more protective measures concerning violence on and off school premises (Yassin, 2019). Throughout the crisis, the Lebanese education sector struggled to keep the pace and to respond to the refugee influx while suffering from structural weakness prior to the crisis. The public schools are lacking spaces to enroll students (HRW, 2015), and under the hardship of overcrowded classes, low quality education, and lack of staff and necessary equipment (Cherri, Gonzalez, & Delgado,

2016) due to the unbearable pressure of the Syrian crisis especially after the Lebanese economic crisis started in 2019.

Violence does not have to be physical, it can come in many other forms and the most stagnant one would be the psychological kind. According to Fadi Al-Qadi, a Middle East human rights specialist, Syrian refugee parents are stuck in a vicious cycle since whatever action they take, their children can be at a huge risk of becoming stateless (Enab Baladi, 2017). The Lebanese government keeps adding policies and rules as if they are forcing the Syrian refugee families to leave by making birth registrations nearly impossible and “there is no legal explanation for this. They are merely practices of an apparently arbitrary nature, which aim to put obstacles and restrictions on Syrians without any justification” (Enab Baladi, 2017). The latter can cause major psychological concerns such as anxiety and can lead to slow and probable health deterioration. Also, in order for Syrian refugee newborns to be registered in Lebanon, their parents have to go through a four-step procedure that is time consuming and often requires extra expenses and documents that they cannot provide (Yassin, 2019) which increases statelessness. The dilemma that the refugee parents have to go through when deciding what should be done concerning their newborn’s registration in Lebanon is excruciating. They fear that their unregistered child will not be able to receive a proper Syrian national passport or authentication documents in the future, which will also lead to major challenges if the family decides to return to Syria (Yassin, 2019). Furthermore, if they stay in Lebanon, their unregistered child might not have access to most of the services offered such as health care, social services and education, and will end up struggling with statelessness (Yassin, 2019). Therefore building up these aggravating social

tensions between host and refugee communities causes serious threats on the ephemeral stability of Lebanon (UN, 2014)

The environment sector is also affected by the presence of the high number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon at various levels. The Lebanese Ministry of Environment reported the serious harm has occurred to the already vulnerable environmental health and sustainability in Lebanon. Besides, the ministry indicated that municipal spending on untreated waste disposal and sewage is mixing up with the existent water sources due to the inflated demand for land, water resources, electricity, and waste disposal (Ministry of Environment, 2014). This lead to raise water pollution by 33% heading toward a consequential alarming rate (UN, 2014)

In sum, refugees lack a number of rights and suffer from marginalization, abuse and harassment. Even when they are trying to live peacefully in host countries, they cannot move freely, easily access work, have the sufficient public services, buy and own property, get their driving license, or finish any legal registration or documentation without any risk (Shiblak, 2009)

One could ask if all the refugees who fled and settled down in other countries have done revolves around negative outcomes and connotations. Fortunately, every challenging situation is accompanied by a beam of light and the one linked to refugees is definitely the international aids they have been receiving all over these years and on all levels. For instance, the Lebanese government has received a total amount of nearly 7.1 billion dollars between 2012 and 2018 because it responded to and came into the support of Syrian refugees (Yassin, 2019). In 2016, at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference held in London, 833 million dollars in grants and 241 million dollars in loans were offered to the Lebanese government by the international

community (Immenkamp, 2017). Therefore, Lebanon was granted a total amount of almost 1.3 billion dollars in 2016, and has received nearly 361.8 million dollars between 2017 and 2020 (Immenkamp, 2017). As for the European Union, it has granted Lebanon more than 1 billion Euros since 2011 and more than 800 million Euros have been spent in order to support both refugees and vulnerable communities within the hosting country (Immenkamp, 2017). Some argues that despite the sudden refugee influx to Lebanon, and the economic, political and social pressure it has put on the country, the government has been fairly supported by many international communities especially the UN (Assi, 2019). The latter has been playing a major role in supporting Syrian refugees around the globe especially the ones residing in Lebanon by dedicating staff in different fields to support them on all levels (Assi, 2019).

Furthermore, international support was also demonstrated through response plans and agreements between donating countries and hosting countries. A good example is the agreement signed between the EU and both Lebanon and Jordan in order to show devotion to the cause by framing and organizing the fund flow and distribution within the hosting countries including all territories on which refugees reside (Yassin, 2019). Hosting countries – mainly Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq – have received donations worth 3.1 billion dollars in grants (Yassin, 2019). It is worth mentioning that the amount of money sent is not necessarily exclusive to Syrian refugees but can also cover the needs of other vulnerable communities and Lebanese areas in need. Therefore, another beam of light is added: the Syrian refugee influx to Lebanon brought more attention to the Lebanese who need help as well. Consequently, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) shed light on the importance of responding positively to the Syrian refugee crisis in order to include Lebanese families who live under the poverty line as

well, thus “strengthening the resilience of national systems and institutions is at the core of the response” (Immenkamp, 2017).

Yet, despite all the financial aids and donations granted, there are still Syrian refugee families who do not receive enough resources, care or help that cover their basic needs (VASyR, 2018).

In addition, Lebanon has been witnessing a noticeable decrease in foreign donations and aid over the years since “the percentage of aid required for UN agencies dropped from 54% and 46% in 2015 and 2016, respectively, to 43% in 2017” (Assi, 2019).

To conclude, people who become or are born stateless have to suffer a lot of hardships throughout their lives. Nevertheless, there can be hope and the UNHCR (2015) suggests several steps to be taken in order to decrease the percentage of statelessness around the world and they are the following: to give children the right to hold the nationality of the country they reside in or are born in; to modify laws in order to allow mothers to pass on their nationality to their children; to abolish laws related to denying newborns their nationality based on their religion or race; and secure international birth registration in order to avoid and limit statelessness. There might be signs and invitations for the Syrian refugees to return to their homeland. However, these invitations are more likely to be tactics of war instead of being authentic signs of peace (Assi, 2019). When it comes to the Lebanese government, there are no concrete solutions so far since laws remain unsigned in order to be issued and applied (Assi, 2019).

4.1 The schizophrenia of the Lebanese

This section addresses how the Lebanese have regarded the Syrians in Lebanon as both a threat and as a value by looking at politicians' notions and conceptions of Syrian refugees on one hand and the beliefs of the Lebanese population regarding Syrian refugees on the other hand.

The situation in Lebanon under the impact of the Syrian crisis has been deteriorating since 2011. Syrian refugees have been perceived in two ways: as an added value and as a burden, at best, and a threat, at worst. The demographic increase of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been an issue that is typically discussed in a negative and offensive tone. The long and complicated relationship between the Syrian and the Lebanese governments has been a historically debated topic that creates duality in Lebanese politics and in the population.

Following the start of the intense Syrian crisis, Syrian refugees have been considered a threat to the established Lebanese system due to different considerations. This argument, in fact, has several supports as well as factors against it. To draw an argument on the impact of the Syrian refugees on Lebanese structure, this paper will analyze the historical, political, and social identity structures that affect and get affected by the mass refugee population in Lebanon through a constructivist lens.

As a matter of fact, Constructivism recognizes threat as an attack on the identity of the agent through considering the temporal and cultural contexts while stressing the role of the agent in the construction process of threat. Therefore, Syria and/or Syrians have been constructed as a threat for much longer than the present refugee crisis. Even before the civil war the Syrian regime has long been a major player in Lebanese politics and specifically during and after the

civil war which is considered a major tragic experience in Lebanese history. The formation of the Lebanese Government as well as elections processes have always been significantly influenced by the Syrian regime's politics and external affiliations. Moreover, throughout the years, Lebanese-Syrian diplomatic relations has always been in favor of the Syrian regime which caused conflict among Lebanese parties.

This larger Syrian-Lebanese interaction takes place parallel to the Lebanese political regime, which is divided based on sectarian considerations. Lebanese politics are supported by a delicate demographic balance and practiced through the "communal pact" to keep all parties and sects included. However, some parties and due to the above deliberations consider themselves in an ideological contradiction with the Syrian regime and consider Syrian refugees a threat to their national identity and political agenda. Hence, the different political affiliations and the dominated dynamics that rule the interrelation between the two countries fortified the state of feeling threatened by Syrians. Feelings of fear, oppression, and persecution will engrave sense of threat and a need to challenge the opponent. This is translated to hate discrimination, hostility, and violence that are highly projected on the Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. On the long term, Syrian refugees, who are majority Sunni, are perceived as threat for the demographic and sectarian balance in the country that threatens the power sharing pact and therefore, their various interests. In addition, the inability of the state and its eligible forces to protect security and stability under the impact of Syrian refugee crisis increases the political infighting.

Moreover, the ramifications of the Syrian crisis, and due to the common borders, the highly intertwined politics, and the large influx of the Syrian refugees to the Lebanese territory,

Lebanon lacks political stability which put its security at a stake. Since the beginning of the crisis, the Lebanese state has retained the “no policy” policy and restrained from constructing a unified and fortified stand regarding the conflict happening in Syria and recognizing the policy facing the crisis. This in fact exacerbates the divisions among the Lebanese parties. One grouping has raised the voice of human rights and opening the borders for the refugees while the other calls for closing the borders and building temporary camps on the borders. This conflict of interests has inflamed other conflicts in Lebanon and created a new dilemma. It is important to recognize that neither side is either ideologically pure nor completely pure in its motives.

The pro-refugee “team” perceives Syrian refugees as tools to navigate narrow and ideological political messages and to pressure its opponents to achieve specific goals. They seem to regard the Syrians as a potential added value that may be manipulated to reformulate the political balance through changing demographics. The chaos and confusion of Lebanese politics and the irregular dynamics have resulted in contradictory and arbitrary decisions and policies regarding the border as well as schools and residential regulations. Hence, too often, Syrian refugees are means to be used for domestic political gains in the Lebanese politicians’ calculations, with an almost complete neglect for the humanitarian lens.

The Lebanese population on the other hand perceives Syrian refugees differently. In general, a number of scholars consider the Syrian refugees as potential military and armed agents. They point to the fact that some refugees got involved in terrorist attacks against the Lebanese army or bombed different areas in Lebanon. The main concern here is on internal security and safety.

Even though armed groups include refugees, they seem to be limited in number and quite controlled by security forces, so public perception is not dominated by this view.

In fact, due to the absence of strong public service infrastructure and weak institutions, the dominant reason for tension between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese hosts has resulted from the inability of the Lebanese state to handle the crisis and its expected impacts on nationals. The presence of the refugees has put significant added pressure the social protection system and pushed it to its limits causing the breaking of some sectors and the rapid descent of others. The increase in demand for needed state interference and the non-response of the state to the current situation has been projected onto Lebanese-Syrian interactions and relations. The emerging dynamics have been manifested as widening the gap between “the Self” and “the Other”, the Lebanese national and the Syrian refugee.

Bourdieu (1979) argues that self-identification is articulated through differentiation and categorization processes. Therefore, due to the existing structures, class classification and dynamics are means and results to identify one’s identity. Lebanese identify themselves as a different class citizen while manipulating the power dynamics.

The field of power as identified by Bourdieu is the “site of struggles between holders of different powers” that hierarchizes different capitals (Mangez & Lienard, 2014). Hence, as a matter of fact, Syrian refugees fall at the end of the social hierarchy due to their situation in Lebanon, which is characterized by poverty, illiteracy, oppression and an embattled identity. Therefore, class classification and hierarchic differentiation processes are frequently applied on Syrian refugees in a negative manner which has inflamed potential inter-communal conflicts.

While it is true that the Lebanese identity remains a cosmopolitan one especially for those living in the cities, the differentiating indexes between Syrian refugees and Lebanese overcome the common indexes. In addition, the capacity of the Lebanese system to absorb the different “other” is limited based on different arbitration due to its implications on its identity which threatens social stability and development.

While examining the Lebanese reality, it is recognized that this multicultural polyglot society is highly polarized and fragmented. “The other” is a significant actor in Lebanese national identity (re)construction, if we can talk about one. The Lebanese identity is subjected to sectarianism, territorialization, and politicization of conflicts that obstruct the formation of a common national identity on one hand and fuel the hyper-politicizations of social groups and societal dynamics and processes on the other. As a result, Syrian refugees are highly politicized and their implications are stratified as mean to achieve a political agenda.

What worsens the situation of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon is that the process of “selfing” and othering” highlights this differentiation by signifying a collective memory that preclude the integration of the other. Besides, the attributable presentations combine two levels: the implicit, which is the subconscious notions and actions, and the explicit, which represent the manipulated attributes and conceptualizations. This explains the role of the Lebanese collective memory in shaping the formation of the other, especially the Syrian refugee other on one hand. While on the other hand, it explains the role of Lebanese politicians and political dynamics in increasing the gap between the self and the other and in fortifying feelings of fear and danger of different individuals, groups, or communities as the potential actor in changing the Lebanese status quo. Thus, under these fragmented social and political systems, and the lack of national

identity and unified political agenda, the gap and differentiation between the hostess and the refugees will remain deep and the impact of the crisis will definitely increase.

Furthermore, Lebanese political figures have also manipulated the Syrian refugees' situation in favor of their own agenda and plans. From 2019 till the present, Lebanon has been passing through delicate crises—the collapse of the currency, the downfall of most sectors, and increasing social and political dilemmas. Several Lebanese political leaders have willfully ignored the impact of the crises on the Syrian refugee communities and their short and long term impact on the Lebanese situation and focused on scapegoating the refugees for the sake of narrow benefits and to achieve points in local political conflicts.

Refugees have been used as a reason for delaying significant reforms in the institutions, law, and political and governmental structure. Demographic, sectarian, and political considerations are used to support their claim and evidence their say for their own benefit. This has led to increased intercommunal tensions. Inflamed hate, racism, and violence would worsen the situation in Lebanon if not expose it to dangerous scenarios such as civil war and extreme chaos.

An interesting example of such political manipulation is a picture posted by the then Minister Gebran Bassil on Instagram in 2017 showing the Ain ElHilwe Camp (a Palestinian camp) in 1960s that was constituted of only a few tents. The post was captioned as “Do not accept [refugee] camps [for Syrians], oh Lebanese” followed by the hashtag “So that the country remains ours”. This post captured Mr. Bassil's use of the politics of threat (also used by other political figures in Lebanon) to fortify his own group loyalty. He pictured refugees in general as a dangerous threat

to Lebanese identity and its continuity. He communicated refugees as a threat to Lebanese ideology, being, stability, and belonging, defining Palestinian and Syrian refugees as having the potential to destroy Lebanon. Bassil—and others—have manipulated social media, power dynamics, and refugees' existence in the country to enforce the sectarian system and inflame conflict rather than enacting major reforms and working towards building a strategy to deal with the Syrian crisis.

Yet the politicians are not alone in this behavior. Parts of the Lebanese population are scapegoating the refugee influx for the crises and structural shortcomings by considering refugees responsible for weak social welfare service, pollution, crime, violence, and chaos. However, these same Lebanese are disregarding the structural malfunction of public institutions, long-term corruption, weak governmental performance, the sectarian system itself, and illogical electoral choices as the main reasons for the current situation.

If Lebanon were more prepared for dealing pragmatically and strategically with the Syrian crisis while benefiting from the international support, the situation wouldn't reach that level. This doesn't eliminate the serious and dangerous impact Syrian refugee influx has caused to Lebanon. Rather, with efficient institutions and effective strategies the government would be more capable and successful in dealing with the Syrian and the current crises.

The present actions wouldn't diminish in the future; rather, it is engraved in individuals' personalities, attitudes, ideas, and collective memories. The impact of the present behavior of the Lebanese political figures and population definitely contribute in building a negative perception, behavior and relationship between Lebanese and Syrians.

Therefore, the thesis argues that the Lebanese formation of threat perception toward Syrians is a dynamic embedded in the Lebanese culture and differentiation system. The Syrian refugee population can impose a threat to the social and political stability by threatening the current status quo. In contrast, the Lebanese perception towards the Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon is not always negative. Syrian refugees provide a wide supply of low skilled workers with low salaries that attract businesses especially in construction and agricultural sectors. This is considered as added value for the businesses in Lebanon that leads to a wider profit margin and increased revenues.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The Syrian refugee population in Lebanon is perceived as a threat as well as a burden for many and as providing value to some—all are constructed perceptions. This thesis tried to describe and analyze the drives behind the threat perception through understanding the identity formation of the Lebanese population as well as to ask questions for future study.

The thesis investigates how the Syrian demographic changes in Lebanon are construed as specific and generalized threats by the Lebanese government and different aspects of Lebanese society. These threats are too often constructed in order to pursue political goals while the core demographic increase is too often ignored by the Lebanese state in planning and other governance activities. This reveals the inability of the state to build a comprehensive system that is capable of absorbing different impacts of the crisis and in making the needed effort to address the situation.

The study is formed of a thorough literature framework that problematizes how threats are constructed as well as the implications of the Syrian refugee existence on Lebanese society. It includes a body of literature on threat construction focusing on how constructivism understands and analyzes threat. The literature on the formation of Lebanese identity and the construction of “the other” in the Lebanese context is also discussed before turning to who is a

Syrian refugee in Lebanon and what are their characteristics, providing an exhaustive description of this population in Lebanon. Then, the thesis discusses the various impacts of the Syrian refugees on Lebanese politics and society and how they played a dual role. Last but not least, an attempt to answer the main research question is carried out before concluding with main research areas that should be investigated thoroughly to understand the reality of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon.

The constant increase of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon and the impacts of the Syrian refugee crisis have put the social welfare system, governmental institutions, political balance and status quo, and social stability under significant pressure. In part, this is due to the general lack of stability of the current status quo and social stability and the lack of coherence in Lebanon. In other words, while the Syrian refugee presence has further stressed the Lebanese system writ large, the Syrian refugee presence did not create the many weaknesses of the Lebanese system. The Lebanese system was unstable and stressed prior to the influx of Syrian refugees. .

What can be done to improve the situation? First, the highly differentiated Lebanese system should be reformulated. A drastic shift should occur to decrease inequalities among different groups in Lebanon through building a more inclusive system. This could be achieved by building a more cohesive national identity as well as strong institutions to manage resident issues based on a pragmatic policies and a unified political agenda.

Moreover, the main defect that elevated the Syrian crisis in Lebanon is the absence of the state in the responding strategies and plans. The “no policy” policy, the lack of interference in

simmering local conflicts, weak coordination with international and local organizations, the absence of a strategic plans and political will for improved governance are all crucial elements that should be present before judging the existence if the Syrian refugees.

In fact, the Syrian refugee crisis is an extensive challenge that should be dealt with at different levels. Local, national, regional, and international powers and forces should be directed and should collaborate to respond properly to the refugee crisis based on humanitarian standards and practices. Three possible directions could be considered as strategies to approach the crisis: the safe voluntary return of the refugees, transition to a third country, and local integration.

Safe voluntary return of the Syrian refugees to Syria is a highly complex path of dealing with refugees. Several efforts have been attempted to build a safe approach for Syrian refugees to returning home voluntarily. The fact that Syrian refugee return is highly politicized divides the labor in to different, sometimes contradicting, coalitions and affiliations. This division is noticeable at the international and local political levels which hinders the effectiveness of any step taken towards dealing with refugees.

Russia is one of the main actors that are paying a high level of attention to the issue of safe and voluntary refugee return. Russia took an initiative which put different steps in motion. It lead two international conferences on the topic. However, the political tensions of Russia behind the executed efforts of returning refugees to Syrian were faced by several clashes that stand against their return. Moreover, the conferences were not followed by any executive plans and eventually their intended goals have no hope in coming to life. Eventually, domestic, regional,

and international political considerations are the basis of dealing with the refugee return issue rather than the humanitarian considerations and the human security indexes.

Therefore, the Lebanese government should make serious diplomatic and political efforts to engage with international organizations and actors as well as with the Syrian regime to provide a safe return for the refugees residing in Lebanon who wishes to return back to Syria. However, realistically speaking, this step wouldn't be effective enough to solve the larger issue of the Syrian presence in Lebanon due to the absence of serious Syrian government intentions to take the refugees back and the fear of refugees to return back to an uncertain fate.

Consequently, the Lebanese government and the international community should also consider other possible paths to navigate the crisis. Being a transit country for refugees is one of the main roles Lebanon has played during the crisis. Lebanon has been for many refugees a step in their journey toward European countries or Canada. However, a large number of them get stranded in Lebanon due to their irregular status, lack of money or knowledge, and prohibitive bureaucratic procedures in the receiving countries.

The UNHCR is the main agent responsible for the relocation of Syrian refugees to a third country. Nevertheless, the Lebanese government has not played a proactive role in encouraging refugees to achieve their aspirations and move onto third countries. Therefore, the Lebanese government should build stronger partnerships and better coordinate with different interlocutors to provide the refugees the knowledge, skills, and support needed to move to a receiving country. Research seems to point to a high percentage of refugees wishing to relocate to countries that host refugees, such as Canada, Germany, and others.

For this strategy to be effective, the state needs to put effort toward preventing exploitation of the refugees and commit to high level of coordination and strategic planning to reach out to refugees and achieve results. Yet this is not enough and is considered costly for a broken government especially without significant international actor support.

The last strategy to deal with refugees is integration. This approach calls for integrating the refugees in the residing country and local communities rather than building an isolated broken sub-society that suffers from various challenges. This process ends usually with a certain type of naturalization that varies from partial to full naturalization. In Lebanon, this strategy could be considered impossible at present due to different social and political dynamics that reject any integration of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Demographic imbalance and political destabilization would be a significant concern for different local and regional interlocutors. The fact that the Syrian refugees in Lebanon almost all belong to the Sunni sect is a particular threat for several actors. This threatens their powers in the country, their interests, and their political agendas. Still, even though integration is a complex, long-term costly process, it can reduce the potential of building isolated poor and violent groups in the future. Integration, therefore, could be a beneficial strategy for domestic affairs at the cultural, political, economic, and social levels. Yet, honestly, looking at the situation in the Lebanese context, integration is not an option at the moment. At the same time, Syrians have been residing and raising families in Lebanon for almost ten years and there have been no serious international efforts for returning refugees home which mean that an identity crisis for refugees and a naturalization conflict Lebanon may just around the corner.

The thesis attempted to investigate the reality of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and the arguments behind the assumption “Syrians are a threat”. I aspired to address in more detail the impact of the Lebanese political structure in shaping the formation process of Lebanese identity and the threat perception of Syrians. It is vital to discuss the role of politics due to the fact that political and social aspects are highly intertwined and connected in Lebanon (as they are elsewhere). They structure and are structured by each other. However, due to the limited timeline of writing the thesis, the political aspect is not discussed more fully in this study.

Significantly, the study highlights several problems that should be addressed by social scientists and legal specialists in an attempt to decrease the intensity of the crisis and to tackle the problem. The thesis sought to describe and analyze the role of the political agendas in solving Syrian refugee issues and the voluntary return process of the Syrian refugees to their origin country as well as the possible different ways of dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis, such as the integration of the Syrian refugees in the Lebanese society. Furthermore, the thesis advocates for systematic changes to build a unified national identity and the possible changes that Syrian refugees existence in Lebanon will force on the Lebanese identity.

The state is the main player in addressing the crisis. Building isolated, poor, discriminated against, illiterate sub-societies who lack minimal standards of living is the critical threat that should be addressed in order to avoid and prevent the postponed social, political, cultural, and economic bomb. Therefore, policy makers should apply serious efforts to construct strategies that best fit the Lebanese situation while meeting the human needs of the Syrian refugee population.

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