# The Securitization of the Syrian Refugee Crisis as a Mode of Governmentality:

## The Free Patriotic Movement in Lebanon

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# Abstract

Following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War (2011-present), Syria's neighboring countries and Western states alike, have voiced concerns over the large refugee influx transpiring. While some states warmly welcomed the waves of refugee influxes, others resorted to adopting extreme stringent measures. Neighboring country and long-term ally, Lebanon, first adopted an open-door policy (2011-2014) towards Syrian asylum seekers and then, shortly after, shifted into imposing restrictive measures and framing Syrian refugees as threats to national security (2014-present). The present study sets out to examine how securitization, framing a targeted group as a security threat, comes into play in the Lebanese context. It focuses on the primary agents of securitization in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), by means of a qualitative case study analysis, a focus on speech acts and policy outcomes. The findings of this study suggest that securitization has proven successful in the Lebanese context owing to socio-historical factors. The study also demonstrates, through the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, how the FPM securitizes Syrian refugee presence to reaffirm their pastoral power and mask their political failures internally.

# Introduction

Over a decade has passed and the atrocities of the Syrian Civil War (2011-present) are yet to halt. The war in Syria has decimated the country and resulted in the largest refugee influx since World War II. More than half of the Syrian population are currently displaced, with 80% of them fleeing to neighboring countries Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (UNHCR, 2022). The responses of states to this massive humanitarian crisis have varied. While some governments warmly welcomed Syrian refugees with an open-door policy, others imposed more stringent measures to curb the refugee influx. UNHCR documented many instances of border closing, the illegal practice of refoulement, and sometimes host states attempted to shift their "responsibility to protect" to other states in an appalling manner that breaches the core provisions of the international refugee regime (Secen, 2021). Governments adopting stringent measures mostly justified their policies on security grounds. They resorted to framing Syrian refugees as threats to the dominant cultural identity of the state, its economy and welfare system, and/or its security as a whole. Promulgating refugees as *security threats* in the public sphere is known as the *securitization of forced migration*.

Lebanon is an interesting case to examine when it comes to the security-migration nexus. The country currently hosts around 1.5 million Syrian refugees and up to 14,000 more refugees from different nationalities (UNHCR, 2022). It first adopted an open-door policy towards Syrian refugees in 2011 and then shifted in 2014 to impose draconian measures which restricted refugee access (Sahin Mencutek, 2017). The shift to stricter measures was juxtaposed with the securitization of Syrian refugees through the public discourses of Lebanese state actors (Secen, 2021). From describing Syrian refugees as "victims", "brothers", and "neighbors" into "security threats" and "burdens", the securitization of Syrian presence in Lebanon implores further investigation. The President of Lebanon, former Leader of the Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun, along with the current leader, Gebran Bassil, have constantly accused the UNHCR and

the EU of having an 'agenda' for the permanent settlement of Syrian refugees locally. Accordingly, the Lebanese government continuously emphasized that Lebanon is neither a country of asylum nor resettlement and seeks the eventual return of Syrian refugees (Secen, 2021). The government currently situates refugees as *threats* to the socioeconomic welfare and safety of the state as it continues to host the highest number of refugees per capita (UNHCR, 2022).

## Background Information

Claiming that an issue such as the Syrian refugee crisis is a threat to a state's national security is what Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde (1998) first introduced as a "securitization act". Such a phenomenon has sprung out of the distress of states facing massive refugee influxes following the disintegration of the Soviet Union along with the steady waves of decolonization happening at the end of the 20th century. Looping refugees with threats to state security, let alone being called potential terrorists, has been fortified following the 9/11 attacks and the initiation of the "War on Terror" by the Bush administration in the United States. This has also coincided with tighter immigration policies by the US and European states alike, especially towards Muslims, or people who were believed to be Muslims (Hraishawi, 2021). Stricter immigration policies have also limited refugee protection for people fleeing countries where persecution is pervasive. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, no state shall *repatriate* an individual who is under the *threat of persecution* in his/her homeland regardless of how the individual arrived at the borders of the host state. This provision is known as the principle of "non-refoulement" and it has continuously been challenged in the case of Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war. It is also important to note that this principle is binding to all states regardless of being a signatory to the 1951 convention or not as it is part of international customary law (Duffy, 2008).

As the conflict in Syria continues to prolong, Syrian refugees are becoming less tolerated in their host countries, especially after the Syrian regime announced the government's victory. Assad's triumph has been perceived by some world leaders as the revival of peace in the country which encouraged and heightened illegitimate refugee return policies. Reports show the deportation of Syrian refugees took place thereafter from both European and Middle Eastern states. The Danish government announced in 2019 that Syrian refugees can no longer work in Denmark and stripped them of their right to obtain residency permits. Eastern European countries such as Romania, Poland, and Hungary, followed suit through executing pushback policies that amounted to the refoulement of Syrian refugees. Similarly, Syria's neighboring countries, specifically Lebanon and Turkey, have voiced "anti-refugee nativism" and grounded their call for Syrian refugee deportation in socioeconomic and security concerns (Nasser & Langlois, 2022). They have even enforced deportation and created conditions that induce repatriation. Nevertheless, to legitimize such actions, all of these governments have referred to **securitization acts** (Secen 2021).

Securitization theory attempts to clarify how an issue such as forced migration may be transformed into the sphere of emergency politics and managed unconventionally – often illegally – when securitized (Secen, 2021). There are several other factors that might deteriorate

state security, yet they remain overlooked when governments prioritize securitizing forced migrants (Balzacq, 2011). The significance of studying the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon lies in being able to understand how a low capacity and relatively small state is operating in the global context involving tensions surrounding migration movements. Securitization theory has also been criticized for not being very relevant outside European contexts, but this case widens its scope as it involves two Middle Eastern countries that not only are geographically proximate, but also have significant historical, political, and cultural ties. Notwithstanding, the Lebanese - Syrian border was relatively porous up until 2014, both countries relied on each other economically and had extensive transnational relations. However, with the instigation of the Syrian Civil War and the mass exodus of Syrian refugees came a dysfunctional response from Syria's allies amounting to the adoption of extreme measures involving the refoulement of Syrian refugees. In short, securitization theory offers a substantive theoretical framework to unpack the security-migration nexus in the Lebanese context.

## Research Questions and Hypothesis

Prior to the 2022 parliamentary elections in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) along with their allies had the biggest bloc within the Lebanese parliament. They played a big role in cabinet decisions and had a hold over major ministries such as the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. Notwithstanding the fact that current President Michel Aoun was the former leader of the FPM. In addition, much of the literature available on the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon suggests that members of the FPM have been the most vocal opposers to Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon (Secen, 2021; Saraya, 2019). This situates the FPM at the heart of studying securitization in Lebanon. As such, the main research question guiding the course of this study is: "Why does the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) in Lebanon choose to securitize the Syrian refugee crisis?" A number of other questions subsequently emerge. These include: Did the FPM succeed in their securitization attempts? What are the factors that have facilitated the securitization process? Has the Lebanese population accepted the securitization of Syrian refugees?

The study thus, strives to examine the key political objectives underlying the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. To accomplish its aim, the study first relies on the sociological modus operandi set forth by Balzacq (2011) to understand securitization in the Lebanese context. To limit the scope, the study will focus on assessing the securitizing acts of the primary agents of securitization in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). Following an understanding of the context along with an exploration of the FPM history and evolution, this study takes the critical approach of Bigo (2002) to unwrap the political motives underlying the FPM's Syrian refugee securitization. Accordingly, it hypothesizes that the securitization of Syrian refugees is a mode of governmentality used by the FPM to affirm their role as providers of protection to their Christian community as well as to mask some of their political failures internally. The concept of governmentality is defined by Bigo (2002) as a type of conduct that regulates and shapes people's behavior.

# Methodology

To comprehend the motives behind the FPM's securitization of Syrian refugees, this study focuses primarily on a qualitative case study analysis. The case study will showcase the historical evolution of the FPM whilst expanding on details that pertain to the scope of the paper. The main purpose behind the case study is to contextualize the position of the FPM from the Syrian refugee crisis. The methods to support the hypothesis include a media mapping of the discourses used by FPM party members with a main focus on the party's leader and main speaker Gebran Bassil. Discourse analysis shows how language can impact the targeted audience and policy making which, in turn, allows the securitizing actor to achieve political gains. The study also relies on the policy reviews of stakeholders' statements, a functional discourse analysis conducted by international agencies, and a great body of scholarly work.

# Literature Review

## The Changing Security Agenda in IR

With the heightening of the Cold War, the security agendas of nation states started expanding to include more than the challenges posed by the buildup of weaponry, war, and military invasions. Among the earliest and most prominent "new security threats" were refugees in protracted situations. Theoretical and empirical evidence trace the relationship between forced migration and security to two main events: First, the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s which has exaggerated fears of mass migration towards Western Europe; and the second incident was the Iraq war of 1990 which marked the first time a refugee crisis was qualified as a threat to international peace and security by the Security Council (Hammerstadt, 2014). Hence, it was becoming clear that the answer to the conceptual debate over "what is security" and the "threats to security" cannot be confined anymore to the realist conception of security as "military prowess". Feminists and post-structuralists focused primarily on conceptualizing security and debating whether it ought to be "gendered or societal", "national or individual". This has also prompted a shift from a state centric security approach to societal security and diversified the contexts in which security threats operate in (Buzan & Hansen 2009). Security studies have thus, developed vertically, with the focal point shifting from state security to societal or global security and horizontally, with the expansion of security contexts to include the economic, health, and social well-being sectors instead of only focusing on military (Jakesevic & Tatalovic, 2016). Waever et. al (1993) explained societal security as the capacity of a nation to withhold its national identity and character with emerging threatening conditions such as that posed by globalization and mass migration. With such developments in the realm of security studies, the following questions come to mind: "what qualifies as a threat to state and societal security? and how does an issue in international relations become securitized?"

## Securitization Theory

The Copenhagen school virtually had the biggest impact on widening the security debate and instigating the "linguistic turn" in IR. This school of thought claims that public issues in a political environment might be either non-politicized, politicized, or securitized. When an issue is non-political, it is not of extreme significance to government officials and thus, not included in their public discourses or electoral campaigning. On the other hand, a politicized issue is one which requires state involvement and control and is opened for the public to be discussed. By contrast, for an issue to be transformed from the sphere of the political into the securitized, it needs to be presented as an **existential matter** requiring direct and **decisive measures** (Buzan et. al, 1998). Proponents of the Copenhagen school further explain how the process can go both ways: issues of public debate may be securitized or de-securitized. De-securitization is when an issue is taken out of the sphere of emergency politics which can be attributed to several factors such as a change in international/regional dynamics or a change in public policy priorities and security agendas. The below graph adopted from Secen (2021) is an apt depiction of the aforementioned processes.
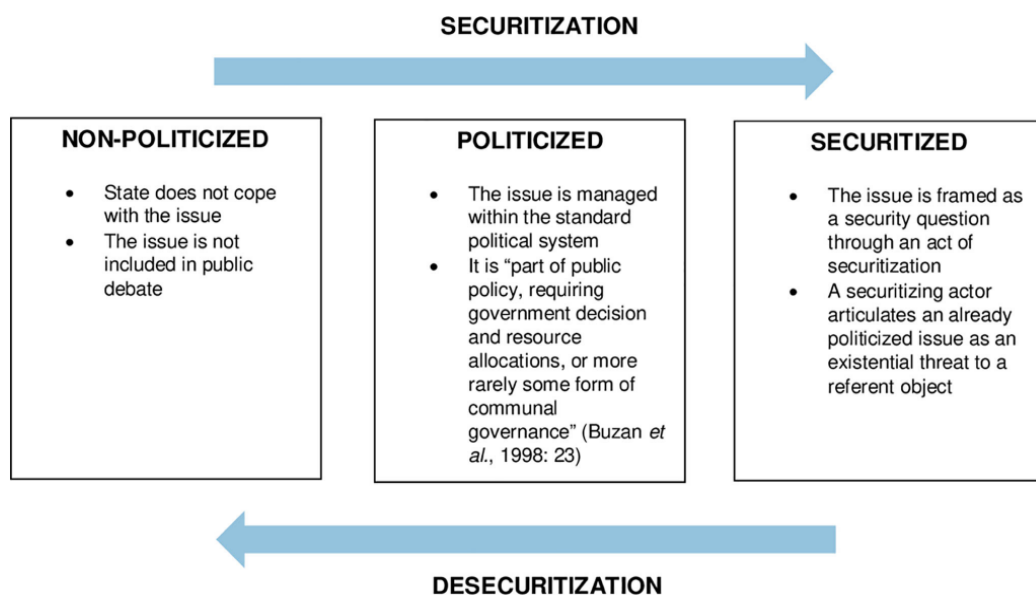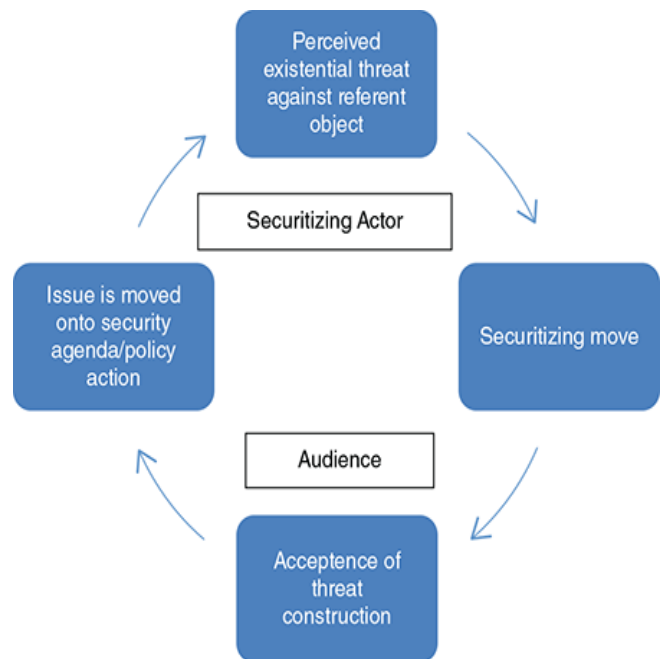


Fig. 1 Categorization of public issues and processes of securitization and desecuritization.

It is important to note that making the link between politicization and securitization does not necessarily mean that the securitizing actors can only be state actors. It is possible for other social entities to securitize an issue and raise it for general consideration as well (Buzan et. al, 1998). Prominent examples include how environmental IGOs, NGOs, and the mass media present the existential threat posed by climate change. The defining factor, however, remains the extent to which the securitization process works. The following section will discuss the *theoretical conditions* needed for a securitization act *to succeed*.

## Operationalization of Securitization

After demonstrating what a securitized issue is and who can securitize, this study shifts into giving a precise understanding of how it occurs, on what issues (threats) and under which conditions can it be successful in accordance with each school of thought. The constructivist works of Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde (1998) were among the most prominent in this regard since they were the first to conceptualize 'security' as a *discursive process*. They framed securitization as a *discourse* that has the potential to (re)frame policy questions as a threat to the security of a certain referent group. Therefore, when the securitizing actor – usually the state – contends through its public discourse that an issue is a threat to the national security of the state, a securitization act occurs. The

Fig. 2: Oxford Research Encyclopedias (Rodgers, 2017)

issue being securitized may not really constitute a security problem, but the way in which it is framed makes it look as such. Depending on the context, issues that are securitized tend to vary between one state, social entity, nation and another (Buzan et. al, 1998). For instance, Saudi Arabia and Iran view the securitization of western culture, claiming that forces of globalization and the western way of living are threatening Islam, as necessary for maintaining their religious/political grip. European states, such as France and Italy, see in securitizing forced migrants' great significance for protecting their national identity. This is what the constructivist school refers to as the "self-referential" security practice i.e., what is considered a security threat to some actors may not be the case for others as it is dependent on each context (Buzan et. al, 1998).

## Speech Acts & the Conditions of Success

The constructivist school also contends that the securitization process is reified through speech acts. Focusing only on uttering the word 'security' in public discourses does not induce a securitizing act. The securitizing actor(s) ought to be calling for the adoption of *extraordinary measures* through their *public discourses* for an issue to amount to the level of a securitizing speech act. Speech acts are important since they enable agenda setting and framing. They also spread awareness on a certain threat among the audience which helps in influencing political behavior and rallying electoral support. For instance, a political actor promulgating climate change as a security threat and promising to advance urgent provisions that tackle climate change will rally the support of those who believe in climate change as being an existential threat. Therefore, constructivists claim that studying securitization requires the qualitative analysis of the actors' speech acts. These acts invoke fear in their targeted audience and

legitimizes issues as threats to national security so that emergency measures may be adopted (Buzan et. al, 1998).

A *successful speech act* is one which combines language and society. Buzan et. al (1998) assert that a speech act can only be successful depending on two conditions: (1) the power dynamics between the actor and the audience; (2) if the targeted audience accept the speech act. In the event of audience refusal or inactivity, the securitizing actor will fail to adopt extreme measures to address the constructed threat theoretically. The above figure from Oxford Research Encyclopedias (2017) further elucidates the operationalization of speech acts.

In sum, constructivists regard securitization as a *discursive process* that is practiced through *speech acts*. Traditionally securitization is a state act, but it can also occur via other non-governmental channels as long as they have the needed social capital to gain resonance. The success of the speech act is largely dependent on the *audience's receptivity*. Therefore, when the referent objects (the audience) accept the security threat being constructed and start treating it as such, the securitizing actors will gain the legitimacy needed to adopt extreme measures or any policy they deem suitable to counter the threat (Buzan et. al, 1998). Other schools of thought have emerged following the Copenhagen school's introduction to securitization, especially to discuss its efficiency in the context of forced migration.

## The Sociological Approach to Securitization

The constructivist approach has laid the grounds for all securitization theories which followed. Albeit it has revolutionized the realm of security studies, it was still accused of falling short in terms of its explanatory power (Bigo, 2002; Balzacq, 2005; Hammerstadt, 2014). Constraining the securitization phenomena to ideological or discursive realms undermines the importance of contextual factors in facilitating the process of securitization. A more holistic and sociological approach to securitization was demonstrated by Thierry Balzacq (2011) in his book: "Securitization Theory: How security problems emerge and dissolve". Rather than relying mainly on speech acts, Balzacq (2011) argues there are three main facets that allow the emergence and withering of a securitization process: "audience, political agency, and the *dispositive* i.e., the context". Balzacq (2011) contends that first the targeted referent objects shall be defined and identified which means that the securitizing speech shall be tailored to a specific type of audience and not the general public. Also, the audience shall be both the public and those in power, but the two shall not be conflated. Each audience can be persuaded using the language/terms that best tune to their experiences and backgrounds. In this respect, security lies in a social context which means that the background/identity of both the actor and the audience ought to be taken into consideration for a successful securitization act. Finally, the context is of great significance since a discourse does not emerge and operate in vacuum. Balzacq (2011) argues that a discourse needs to be situated historically and socially and operationalized accordingly. The below table extracted from his book simplifies the levels of analysis which he considers essential for understanding the securitization process.

*Table 2.1* The vocabulary of securitization (revised from Balzacq 2009a: 64)

| | | *Constituent analytics (UNITS)* |
|---|---|---|
| **Levels** | Agent | • Securitizing actor, audience, functional actor<br>• Power positions/relations<br>• Personal and social identities<br>• Referent object and referent subject |
| | Act | • Action-type<br>• Heuristic artefacts<br>• Dispositif<br>• Policy |
| | Context | • Distal<br>• Proximate |

Concurring to the view of (in)security as a social construct advanced by both the sociological and constructivist approach, Bigo (2002) states that securitization is a "transversal political technology" which contributes to the uneasiness of the local population and allows the securitizing actors to have a grip over their respective populaces. Inspired by French Philosopher Michel Foucault, Bigo (2002) adopts a critical approach to comprehend the reasons behind the persistence and success of a securitizing act. If securitization is solely dependent on the speech acts reified by people in positions of power, then why don't alternative discourses set forth by opposing parties have a major effect on the political realm? While Balzacq (2011) emphasizes the context as an overlooked factor in this regard, Bigo (2002) suggests that state actors will always have a more resonating discourse since they have the means to capitalize on the uneasiness of the masses towards a certain referent group and afterwards, convince them of their role as the sole protectors of the polity. In this respect, securitization is seen as a mode of governance rather than a discursive/ideological phenomenon. He refers to it as a political technology administered by state actors and facilitated by the security apparatus of the state. Hence for the securitizing speech acts to function, the securitizing actors ought to have a hold of the needed bureaucracies, security apparatuses, power positions, and capacities to mobilize groups such as the media and their target audience efficiently (Bigo, 2002).

Notwithstanding, much of the literature available today asserts that security threats are mostly constructed with underlying political objectives resulting in the adoption of policies which suit those objectives – that is in the event of successful securitization. Bigo (2002) suggests that state actors' resort to naming an adversary or even an internal enemy in attempt to cover up for the shortcomings of the state in fulfilling its duties. The fear of losing symbolic control over territorial boundaries and the need to 'survive at any cost' has allowed the ruling elite to concentrate fears on any potential adversary through securitization (Bigo, 2002). Nowadays, immigrants and more specifically, refugees, are being framed as the *groups of risk* to the polity.

## Securitization of Forced Migration

When the phenomenon of securitization evolved, it was linked to immigration, especially since most studies were looking into its practice in the West where immigration as a movement has always been securitized. The security-forced migration nexus gained momentum with the initiation of decolonization waves, the expansion of intrastate wars in the 1990s, and most prominently, the September 11 attacks (Jakesevic & Tatalovic, 2016). Refugees became perceived as agents of insecurity and often linked to the discourse on terrorism. Governments on the other hand, tightened their borders and enforced strict immigration policies. Up until now, refugees are looked down upon and often cast as "outsiders" who possess starkly different features than that of the local population (Hammerstadt, 2014, p.269). The securitization of migration has led to the dehumanization of refugees and asylum seekers. It transformed forced displacement from a humanitarian issue into a security one requiring extreme countermeasures. Instead of looking at the essential needs of forcibly displaced migrants arriving at the borders of states, the discourse used by state officials has changed into deciding on the needed security measures to "protect" the well-being of their own citizens (Saraya, 2019). The fear of growing migration rates is what Huysmans (2006) describes as the "politics of unease". In his analysis, Huysmans (2006) points out to how refugees were recurrently situated within internationally alarming risks such as people smuggling and trafficking, in addition to accentuating the "overburdening implications" of immigration figures in the West. In essence, refugee mass influxes might induce instability in the host country, especially in prima facie conditions. However, the task ahead is not to disregard security concerns, but rather to create policies that strategically respond to the essential needs of migrants in a way that both safeguards their lives and that of the host community.

Much of the literature on securitizing forced migration has demonstrated the gravity of looping immigrants with security concerns. Hammerstadt (2014) elucidates how the lack of responsiveness of European states towards refugees in the Mediterranean has led to their perishing and is symptomatic of a securitization practice. For instance, Italy has pursued an aggressive anti-immigration discourse which was translated in their public policy towards migrants. In 2013, 364 Eritreans reportedly died in a fishing boat that caught fire on the coast of the Italian island, Lampedusa, and sank. Following one week on the incident, another boat which had an estimated number of 250 Syrian refugees also sank in the same area without the needed policy response or media coverage. In addition, many refugee boats were reportedly sent back to North Africa, especially when the civil war in Libya broke out and fear of refugee influx to Europe culminated (Hammerstadt, 2014). All of these stringent state practices are a breach of the non-refoulement principle and inherently inhumane. NATO vessels and merchant ships also turned a blind eye to many migrants in distress and reports show that the number of refugees and migrants who died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean amounted to 1,500 persons in 2011. Similarly, irregular migrants arriving at Greek shores are facing vast prison-like detention centers and are at risk of direct deportation (Hammerstadt, 2014). Notwithstanding, all countries adopting such harsh measures in response to refugee influxes are practicing real-life securitizations and anti-refugee nativism to legitimize their acts and claim them to be a 'defense of the motherland'.

## Conceptual Framework of this Study

When it comes to the Lebanese state's securitization of Syrian refugees, much of the literature focuses on the Copenhagen school's approach to securitization (Estriani, 2019; AlHelou, 2021; Mourad, 2019; Hraishawi, 2021). To reiterate, the constructivist school examines the linguistic construction of security threats through speech acts made by securitizing actors. However, focusing solely on the political discourse tends to undermine the role of contextual, bureaucratic, and administrative security practices in permitting securitization (Saraya, 2019). Accordingly, other studies have focused on a more sociological approach to securitization, proposed first by Balzacq (2011), where the focal point shifts to the audience, political agency of the actor, and the underlying social context (Saraya 2019; Secen 2021). This study will be adhering to the sociological approach to properly show the interlinkage of security-migration concerns in the context of Lebanon. The main focus will be on the securitizing acts of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) in Lebanon in order to answer the research question "Why does the FPM in Lebanon choose to securitize the Syrian refugee crisis?". Hence, a brief overview of the political party's establishment, political ideology and evolution, is necessary to contextualize the FPM's stance from Syria and afterwards, conduct a media mapping of the discourses pertaining to the Syrian refugee crisis by FPM members and leaders. Finally, the study will be concluded with the main findings based on the case study analysis and the available qualitative data.

## Case Study

The Lebanese polity is best described as a confessional system incentivizing people to pledge allegiance to a group of financial-economic, religious, and political elites at the expense of the state (Salloukh, 2015). Syria's intervention in the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and its tutelage over Lebanon in the post-War period (1990-2005) has polarized the dominant confessional parties locally and affected their political stances on the Syrian Civil War thereafter. Hence, understanding the grounds which the FPM rests on with respect to the Syrian Civil War and refugee crisis requires a look in retrospective on their evolution as a movement, stance from Syrian tutelage, and subsequent institutionalization as a sectarian political party.

The case study section will be divided into two parts: it will first present the evolution of the FPM movement and its political rationale based on mainly the book of Joseph Helou (2020): "Activism, Change and Sectarianism in the Free Patriotic Movement in Lebanon" with relevant scholarly work. Second, it will attempt to showcase how the party practices securitizing Syrian refugees through zooming in on the party's political discourses and public policy. It is important to note that the first section discussing the FPM's evolution does not tackle all the details pertaining to the history of the movement. It rather aims at contextualizing the FPM and providing the background needed to better understand the main underpinnings of Syrian refugee securitization – in an effort to respond to the questions posed by this study.

## Part I: Free Patriotic Movement's Evolution

### 1- Emergence of the Pro-Aoun Support Movement (1988-1990):

To start off, the FPM became a political party following the end of Syrian patronage over Lebanon in 2005 and the consequent withdrawal of all Syrian troops. The Syrian tutelage was initiated by means of the Taif Agreement, Saudi and US-backed peace accord which put an end to the Lebanese Civil War and instigated *the patronage of Syria* in the post-war era. Current President of Lebanon and creator of the FPM movement, Michel Aoun, strictly opposed Syrian presence in Lebanon and as a result, was ousted in 1990 by means of a Syrian military-led operation to take refuge in France.

Aoun was a Lebanese Army Commander who made his first official presence in the political realm after then-President, Amine Gemayel, appointed him to form a Cabinet in 1988. As per the Lebanese National Pact of 1943, the PM ought to be a Sunni Muslim which prohibited Aoun, a Maronite Christian, from getting the legitimacy needed for the full operation of his cabinet. Notwithstanding, Aoun launched multiple attacks against sectarian militias violating the state's sovereignty and established himself as a non-sectarian governor among the confessional ruling militias. This also made him garner support from both the Muslim and Christian populaces who were devastated by war and militia rule. Aoun denounced the presence of any foreign military group on Lebanese lands including the Syrian army and mainly rejected the Taif Agreement for not setting a clear time frame for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. In essence, it is claimed that the main contributing factors leading up to a pro-Aoun movement were people's disappointment with the prevailing militia order during 1988-1990, Aoun's secular vision and rejection of foreign patronage, as well as his military background and emphatic reputation (Helou, 2020, Chapter 2).

### 2- Syrian Withdrawal from Lebanon and Aoun's Return (1990-2005):

During the post-war period, while Aoun was exiled to France (1990-2005), his supporters mobilized in Lebanon through internal and external channels. Within the first five years following his expulsion, a media ban was imposed on Aoun so as to prevent any kind of communication with his supporters in Lebanon and to limit the possibility of extreme political mobilization. Much of the coordination between the two took place within internal circles and through civil society. FPM activists, however, knew how to organize themselves in universities, syndicates, protests, demonstrations, and called for the secular notions first raised by their leader: "freedom, sovereignty, and the independence of Lebanon". They also seized political opportunities to coalesce as a national movement such as the relaxation of state control[1], significant divisions among the ruling elite group, municipal elections and organized collective activity in streets and public spaces. Therefore, the continuation of the FPM was largely dependent on the mobilization and commitment of its supporters. Aoun also had a big role in maintaining the peaceful and secular orientation of the movement from abroad (Salloukh, 2015; Helou, 2020, Chapter 4).

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[1] The Lebanese state cannot be considered as a unitary actor due to the presence of great divisions and volatile alliances between the political elite. The state in this period was more of a coalition of elite strategies (Salloukh, 2015)

Up until 2005, FPM groups were still ostracized from the political sphere and more so, the Christian public opinion was sidelined as a result of the politicization of Lebanon's foreign policy interests to serve that of Syria (Salloukh, 2015, Chapter 2). A decisive moment in Lebanon's political history was when Saudi-backed PM and post-war Sunni leader, Rafic Harriri, got assassinated in 2005. International condemnation of the act took place and all fingers pointed at Syria since they were overseeing the Lebanese security apparatus at the time. Regardless of the perpetrators of the crime (as its still locally contested), the wave of international denunciation and nation-wide protests pushed Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The protests of 2005 generated two political blocks which have dominated the Lebanese political scene up until today: a pro-Syrian regime camp, known as the **March 8 alliance**, and an anti-Syrian camp, known as the **March 14 alliance** (Salloukh, 2015; Helou, 2020). Hezbollah, Iranian-backed, Shiite party has constituted the main pillar of the March 8 alliance while Saudi-backed Sunni Future Movement, led by Rafic Harriri's son, were part of the March 14 alliance along with anti-Syrian Christian parties as the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb political parties.

### 3- From a Secular Movement to a Sectarian Political Party:

Following the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005, Michel Aoun was able to return back to Lebanon and his popularity gained momentum again. He took the decision to transform the FPM into a political party which subsequently forced him to *adapt* to the sectarian system set in place. In other words, the FPM found that being part of the Parliament along with the Council of Ministers necessitates adopting sectarian strategies and discourses to lure and adequately represent its predominantly Christian base which is ultimately their electorate (Salloukh, 2015). Besides changing the secular rhetoric, Aoun found himself in need to forge strong alliances to gain an absolute majority in Parliament and later on satisfy presidential ambitions. Accordingly, he chose to forego his strong hostility towards Hezbollah and shifted into the March 8, pro-Syria camp, after signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2006 with the Iranian backed political party. Both parties feared the marginalization of their power in the post-Syria era as Hezbollah lost the Syrian political cover whereas Aoun sought to balance out the March 14 block and its public institutions takeover against the backdrop of Syrian withdrawal (Salloukh, 2015). In short, Aoun like many of his counterparts was forced to shift and adapt to the regional and local political developments if he were to sustain his Christian support base and formal political representation.

After 2005 and the FPM's formal entry into conventional politics, much of its policies and positions were dictated by the prevailing political factors locally and regionally. Sectarian modes of political subjectification were succumbed to and the FPM, like their fellow counterparts, showed vested interest in the persistence of the sectarian balance of power and confessionally divided political system. Aoun wanted to redefine himself as a Christian leader especially after firmly standing with Hezbollah through the 2006 Israeli invasion, the May 7 incident, and other contentious events on the Lebanese political scene which resulted in a decrease in the FPM's follower base. Aoun even capitalized on improving his relations with Syria including planning formal visits to cities consisting of Christian minorities such as the

Syrian city of Barad (Helou, 2020). Therefore, to increase his power among the Christian populace and establish the FPM as the sole protector of Christian rights, Aoun was forced to go with the tide, even if it meant renouncing the fundamental secular principles of the FPM.

### 4- FPM and the Syrian Civil War:

With the eruption of the Syrian uprising in 2011, fear of a potential spillover into Lebanon grew significantly. An extreme polarization in the stances of the political elite from the war was clearly evident: The March 8 alliance showed support to the Assad regime while the March 14 alliance expressed solidarity with the uprising (Geha & Talhouk, 2018). To prevent Lebanon from bearing the brunt, then-President Michel Suleiman convened a "National Dialogue Committee" in 2012 which resulted in the agreement of both political camps on the "Policy of Dissociation". This policy distanced and neutralized Lebanon from the political turmoil in Syria and prioritized the national interest over ideational, sectarian, and regional ambitions (Naoum, 2014; Khazai & Hess, 2013). Shortly thereafter, the policy turned futile when Shiite political party and Assad ally, Hezbollah, decided to support the regime and formally join the conflict in Syria. Opposition forces were quick to condemn such an act while Aoun stood by his ally, claiming that Assad's fall will lead to a rise in extremist groups that would terminate pluralism and endanger Maronites in both Lebanon and Syria (Naoum, 2014). The division over Hezbollah's intervention in Syria has caused a political stalemate in the country as parliamentary elections were postponed, the cabinet(s) were paralyzed, a presidential vacuum ensued and consequently, the country's socioeconomic situation significantly deteriorated (Geha & Talhouk, 2018).

Finally, in 2016, the FPM managed to overrule the political bipolarity following a series of meetings with parties from both March 14 and March 8 camps in which Aoun was agreed upon and voted later to be President. In addition, the FPM won the majority of seats in the legislature which made them obtain a constitutional veto and maintain a grip over the council of ministers. This victory was heralded as the return of Christian power and dominion in the post-war period. Notably, an important player contributing to this victory was MP Gebran Bassil who became the leader of the FPM movement in 2015 following Aoun's presidency. Bassil was responsible for many significant initiatives during his tenure as a foreign minister and through other ministerial portfolios. He opposed making Syria a battlefield for regional proxy wars and called for the right of Syrians to determine their own fate – a statement which was welcomed by the Syrian regime (Helou, 2020, Chapter 6). Later on, however, he became known for his "anti-migration rhetoric" and staunch opposition to Syrian refugee presence. Why did the focal point shift suddenly to Syrian refugees as being security threats? What conditions precipitated the FPM's continuous call for Syrian refugee repatriation and how was it manifested in the political sphere?

## Part II: FPM & Syrian Refugee Crisis

The second part of this case study will explain the Lebanese government's policy response, or lack thereof, towards Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon. It will then shift into highlighting how securitization theory comes into play in the Lebanese context by focusing on the political

discourses and subsequent policies of the FPM towards Syrian refugees locally. The paper will then conclude with a discussion on the main findings of this study, key takeaways and limitations, based on a case study analysis and qualitative data.

### 1- The "Policy of No Policy" (2011-2014):

With the eruption of the Syrian Civil War, thousands of Syrian refugees sought asylum in neighboring and "brother" country Lebanon. The Lebanese government first adopted an open-door policy towards Syrian refugees which meant that no restrictions were imposed upon the entry of asylum seekers (Sahin Mencutek, 2017). The international community along with relevant international organizations have hailed Lebanon's efforts and 'hospitality' when it comes to hosting Syrian refugees. The Lebanese government was specifically commended for not holding encampment procedures and restrictive border control policies. In actual fact however, the government's "hospitality" was backdropped with a political stalemate among the ruling sectarian elite which had polarizing positions from the conflict in Syria (Janmyr, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the "Policy of Dissociation" promulgated in 2012 did not last long after Hezbollah joined the conflict and started supporting the Assad regime militarily. The March 8 and March 14 camps were unable to reach a consensus regarding the needed policy to address the plight of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In addition, regional actors who have long backed the ruling political elite in Lebanon, mainly Saudi Arabia, Iran and the US, had opposing positions in Syria which further pressured their allies in Lebanon and faltered the possibility of a consensus. Accordingly, the 1.5 million Syrians who fled to Lebanon from 2011 till 2014 were left without a suitable protection framework, simply navigating their way through the ad hoc policies which the government kept on adopting incrementally (Geha & Talhouk, 2018). In light of the latter, UNHCR was the de facto proxy managing the presence of Syrian refugees and issuing the needed residency permits.

### 2- The Shift into Syrian Refugee Securitization (2014 - present):

**Stage One: FPM Speech Acts**

It is believed that the securitization of Syrian refugees started manifesting in the public sphere as the number of refugees in Lebanon increased and the war in Syria intensified. Building on the available literature, securitization is initiated by speech acts and is only successful when the audience accept it and allow its manifestation through emergency measures and public policies. When examining speech acts, one ought to look at the specific terms that are used interchangeably with "refugees" to magnify the security threat associated to them (Mourad, 2019). Virtually all of the political elite in Lebanon, belonging to both camps, have securitized Syrian refugees or/and advocated their return to conflict-ridden Syria. President Aoun even started his inaugural speech to Parliament by calling upon "the swift return of Syrian refugees" hinting at escalating security threats. Likewise, leader of the FPM Gebran Bassil, is accused of being the most "vehement opponent of Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon" (Secen, 2021).

One of the earliest accounts of FPM securitized speech acts was through rejecting a relief plan set forth by the Cabinet to manage the refugee influx. Then-Energy and Water Minister Gebran

Bassil said: "We are the only ones to have objected and we will continue to object because the relief plan … [it] practically aims to attract more refugees to Lebanon". Bassil continues to explain how everyone eventually will become aware of the "negative consequences the refugee *issue* has on all Lebanese" (CLDH, 2013). The FPM were also from the political parties rejecting encampment, claiming that camps may become a center for outlaws and might lead to the permanent settlement of Syrian refugees (CLDH, 2013). The discourse on the permanent settlement of refugees is an *intentional securitizing act* that triggers audience receptivity, given that many Lebanese people fear that Syrian asylum seekers might permanently stay just as Palestinian refugees settled post 1948 in Lebanon. Their fear – or the fear which Christian factions in Lebanon capitalize on – is based on the belief that integrating the majority Sunni Palestinian and Syrian refugees might offset the fragile balance of power between Christians and Muslims locally. It is important to note that the balance of power between Muslims and Christians dominates the agendas of Lebanese political leaders since they operate in a confessional system of power-sharing. For instance, the securitization of Palestinians has worked and continues to succeed since the Lebanese government refrains from granting Palestinian refugees their most basic civil and political rights under the slogan of safeguarding "sectarian coexistence" (Saraya, 2019). Hence, securitizing Syrian refugee presence seems an expected political strategy for all sectarian factions seeking to preserve their power internally and in particular, Christian leaders.

MP Gebran Bassil continuously justifies his opposition towards Syrian refugee presence as a form of patriotism and a matter of prioritizing Lebanese nationals over foreigners. He echoed the term "Lebanon above all" and played on the idea of Lebanese being "biologically similar". Consequently, his securitizing discourses were met with racist and xenophobic attitudes from his audience. For instance, he shared a video two years ago on Twitter showing FPM supporters protesting in front of a restaurant that is hiring Syrian refugees. Bassil captioned the tweet with: "If you love Lebanon… employ Lebanese". In the same day, Bassil announced that the youth of FPM will be campaigning against businesses which employ Syrian refugees and called upon the general public to send in pictures and videos of restaurants that are doing so (Chehayeb, 2019). This is a solid example of a successful securitization act as FPM supporters quickly mobilized and started campaigning with slogans stating: "Protect Lebanese workers and file a complaint about violators…Syria is safe for return and Lebanon can no longer take it" (Chehayeb, 2019). MP Bassil even mentioned in another tweet that he supports women in Lebanon passing on their nationality (an issue that is yet to be solved), with the exception of women married to Palestinians or Syrians (Harb, 2016). To further amplify his 'nationalism', Bassil tweeted that the FPM's affiliation is only to the Lebanese people, adding that "it is genetic and focused on the integration among Lebanese while refusing the settlement of refugees and displaced people" (Chehayeb, 2019). Attempts to use religion as means for securitization had been also recorded. President Aoun said in a tweet: "the Christians of the east are not temporary on this land and are not foreign congregations in it and cannot allow under any circumstances or suffering to pull them out of it. They are its people" (Alhelou, 2021). In sum, the FPM, represented by its leader Gebran Bassil, seem to appeal to their Christian populace via a nationalistic discourse that disguises its securitizing acts towards Syrian refugees.

In his capacity as Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil, has also appealed to the international community for aid and funding, threatening refugee repatriation in case Lebanon is not assisted. In the Arab Summit in Beirut held in 2014, MP Bassil proclaimed refugees as "urgent security threats" and believed they might have among them extremist groups, given Lebanon's open-door policy. He also hinted at the need to adopt more stringent security measures to curb the mass influx, claiming that the current situation "threatens the existence of Lebanon as a whole because of the plots to establish military blocs" (Mourad, 2019). In the more recent Arab Summit of 2019, Bassil this time lobbied for refugee return "to curb the misery" posed on the Lebanese economy. President Aoun also suggested that refugees needed to return "without trying to reach a political solution" at the Summit (Reuters, 2019). This is one of the many times where the Lebanese political elite expressed little to no concern about the instability and insecurity that Syrian refugees might experience when repatriated which is also a breach of International Humanitarian Law (Alhelou, 2021). MP Bassil recurrently expresses that the Syrian regime's victory is an indicator that Syrian refugees can return even though Syria is still not ripe for a political solution and the conditions of return are not safe (Alhelou, 2021). Nevertheless, the securitization of Syrian refugees and humanitarian appeals are not exclusive to social media platforms. In a study conducted by UNDP in 2015 on the representation of "Syrians" and "Palestinians" in the Lebanese media, reports covering security issues relating to Syrians and Palestinians constituted 83% of the total of negative-tone news. Moreover, OTV, which is a TV station backed by the FPM, had the highest number of reports on refugee arrests and security breaches which ultimately aim at representing refugees as safety threats (UNDP, 2015). Thus, the public discourses of the FPM on Syrian refugees hold countless instances of securitization on the basis of socioeconomic and political insecurity. With such a dangerous image imprinted in the minds of the Lebanese population, speech acts manage to reify the securitization process.

**Stage Two: Policy Action**



Figure 3. Process of Securitization
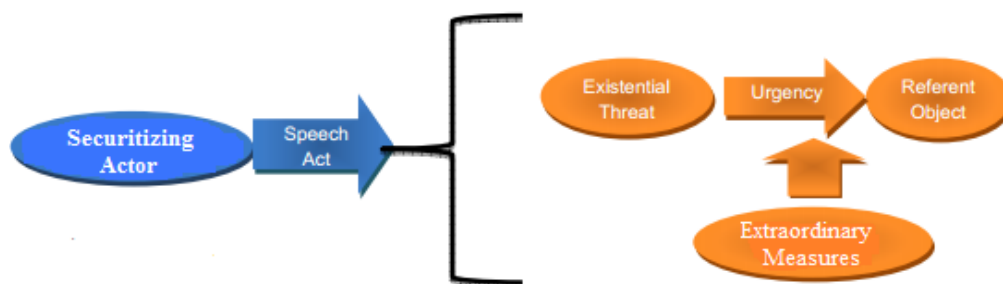
Source: Özcan, S. (2013:62). West East Journal of Social Sciences. Vol.2 No.2.

According to securitization theory, the securitizing actor is granted a blanc cheque to implement emergency measures following the dissemination of speech acts (Buzan et. al, 1998). On the Lebanese scene, it can be inferred that there was a shift to restrictive measures towards Syrian refugees in 2014 which juxtaposed a series of securitizing speech acts. Although the measures that will be delineated below are associated with the Lebanese government, it is important to

note that as of 2016, the FPM had majority in the Parliament along with its allies (a constitutional veto), a grip over decisions passed in most Cabinets formed and more notably, Michel Aoun as President (Helou, 2020, Chapter 6). In addition, FPM leader Bassil continuously expresses how the FPM is responsible for positing most proposals on Syrian refugee return (Secen, 2021).

In 2014, the borders of Lebanon closed to almost all Syrian refugees with a few exceptions, something rigorously called for by FPM members and their Christian counterparts. The exceptions, however, did not include asylum seekers fleeing persecution which makes Lebanon in direct violation of the "non-refoulement" principle (ICL 2015). By May 2015, UNHCR was forced to stop registering incoming refugees as well as those present in the country without a permit. Asylum seekers wanting to obtain a legal presence in Lebanon had to find a "guarantor" to sponsor their stay which also costs them a lot of money (Fakhoury, 2017). UNHCR was even compelled to de-register more than 1400 refugees which arrived in Lebanon after January 5, 2015 (Badalic, 2019). The lack of residence permits increases the risk of forced deportations, arrests, home eviction, confiscation of official documents and the inability to register births, deaths, and/or marriages. It also reportedly led to the illegal entry and escape of asylum seekers to nearby countries. The Lebanese government even approved a policy of refugee return in July 2019. All Syrians caught illegally entering the border after 24 April 2019 were subjected to repatriation without judicial review. The Lebanese Directorate General of General Security affirmed the return of 6,345 Syrian persons between 25 April 2019, and 19 September 2021 (ACHR, 2021). On the other hand, entering legally required conforming to a series of discriminatory criteria. For instance, Syrians coming from areas assumed to be "stable and safe" by the Lebanese government were not allowed to enter and that was at the height of the Syrian conflict in 2014. Even those who were coming from areas that were not close to the Lebanese border – geographically – were prevented from entry. Notwithstanding Palestinians coming from Syria were further sidelined and mostly denied entry out of fear of potentially perpetrating crimes and becoming security threats (Badalic, 2019). All of these measures, which are in direct contravention of International Law, strip refugees of their basic rights and have been backed by ongoing speech acts.

Besides the policies of repatriation which were accepted by the people, the Lebanese government attempted to create an environment conducive for refugee return, a phenomenon known as "constructive refoulement". It first disallowed Syrian refugees who were registered with the UNHCR prior to 2015 from working even though the sectors that they were allowed to work in were limited to "services, agriculture, construction, and manufacturing". The Ministry of Labor even instructed raids to close down shops which are illegally opened whilst ironically not allowing anyone to register with the notion of protecting Lebanese nationals (Badalic, 2019; Janmyr, 2016). Preventing Syrian refugees from the right to work coupled with extreme conditions to legally reside in Lebanon have worsened the conditions of Syrian refugees locally. In the latest Vulnerability Assessment Report, 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees were reportedly suffering from drastic poverty conditions (UNICEF, 2021). With the UNHCR being prevented from registering refugees, obtaining/renewing a residency permit for an implausible amount (200 $) along with having a guarantor are the only ways for refugees to legally reside in Lebanon and thus, gain access to healthcare, register births and marriages, and

enroll in schools. With such a refoulement-conducive milieu, most Syrian refugees are stuck in a legal limbo and live under constant fear of being targeted by the Lebanese security forces (Fakhoury, 2017). While the Lebanese government have thought this would trigger voluntary migration back to Syria, it only led to the illegal settlement of the great majority of Syrian refugees instead (Refugee Protection Watch, 2021). On the other hand, the government justified its internationally unlawful actions by pledging to set a new procedure for refugee registration (Badalic, 2019). Yet, with the remaining political stalemate and lack of institutional frameworks, the precarious situation of Syrian refugees further develops (UNHCR, 2021).

## Discussion

### Securitization as a Function of Sociological-Historical Factors

The deteriorating conditions of Syrian refugees locally have not induced a wave of condemnation among the Lebanese populace. While some people rioted against the government's inhumane action and numerous humanitarian organizations denounced FPM Leader Gebran Bassil's racist campaigns, the great majority of people believed the securitizing rhetoric and became hostile towards Syrian refugee presence. Such a hateful attitude was manifested through racist, discriminatory, and often violent behavior against Syrian refugees locally (Kadi, 2017). With the government's anti-refugee rhetoric and constant accusations of Syrian refugees 'burdening' the economy, financial situation, and even the environment; it becomes virtually impossible to convince the masses of an alternative discourse. Many studies have attempted to show the positive impact of Syrian refugee presence, but they remain heavily underreported. Research-based initiative, Refugees=Partners, have claimed that refugees have boosted the economy as their presence led to the creation of 10,000 more jobs annually (Mukhamedov, 2019). David et. al (2020) also show in their study on the 'economics of the Syrian refugee crisis' how their presence in Lebanon yielded a positive impact on the country's growth, especially by means of humanitarian aid flows. In the same manner, Lebanese researcher at Human Rights Watch, Bassam Khawaja says: "It is not helpful to have statements blaming Syrians for issues of the Lebanese economy, unemployment, insecurity and extremism in Lebanon without any evidence or factual basis." Therefore, even with implausibility of the claims made against Syrian refugees, securitizing their presence has proven to work in the Lebanese context.

Building on Balzacq's (2011) sociological approach to securitization and the above case study, this paper posits that the Lebanese populace, and most prominently the Christian supporter base of the FPM, have been responsive to the securitized speech acts largely due to the deep collective history of Lebanon's experience with Palestinian refugees and the Syrian military interventions and tutelage over Lebanon. Balzacq (2011) emphasizes the need to tailor the discourse to a specific type of audience which in this case is the Christian populace. The multiple factions existing within the country have a major fear of the 'other' taking over as a result of the confessional division of power locally. This made framing Syrian refugees as a threat to the identity of the Lebanese population a suitable securitizing discourse. The other

factors emphasized in Balzacq's model are the political agency of the actor(s) and the context. The power positions of the FPM, their grip over ministerial decisions and majority in Parliament, have definitely facilitated the implementation of emergency measures that worsened the situation of Syrian refugees locally and even induced repatriation. Nevertheless, the most important factor remains the 'context' or the 'dispositif' as Balzacq (2011) termed it. The FPM has constantly made reference to the fear of permanent refugee settlement and the "dangers" associated with the possibility of naturalizing Syrian refugee presence in an attempt to link this situation with that of the Palestinians. They also underpinned their securitized speech acts with sectarian notions, claiming that Syrian refugees have among them Sunni extremist groups and their settlement is likely to cause a demographic imbalance in the favor of Sunnis. Albeit the Palestinian refugee situation in Lebanon is not quite the same, Lebanese people have blatantly expressed their belief of permanent refugee settlement and continuously compared both situations. The FPM certainly reinforced the latter with continuous claims that Lebanon will not accept the "international conspiracy" planned by the East and West to keep Syrian refugees in Lebanon and "naturalize" them (Naharnet, 2015). This also allowed the government to categorize Syrian refugees as "temporary guests" and further deny them their rights as refugees. Hence, the securitizing discourse has resonated with a big part of the Lebanese population as a function of sociohistorical factors which simultaneously allowed emergency – often unlawful – measures to be taken.

## Securitization of Syrian Refugees as a Mode of Governmentality

Besides focusing on the context, the securitizing actors play a major role in allowing securitization to succeed. In the case of Lebanon, the existing factions look to their sectarian leaders as the containers of the Lebanese polity. As such, when the FPM sought to securitize the presence of Syrian refugees, their supporters were quick to mobilize as a result of the power positions held by the FPM in addition to the aforementioned contextual factors. This process is described by Bigo (2002) as a form of governmentality, a political technology of the ruling elite, founded on the fears and unrest of the inhabitants and projected against an "adversary" who is always opaque and difficult to deal with. As such, those in power can present themselves as *protectors* of the collective and *defenders* of the motherland against the *adversary* which is framed as responsible for the internal structural difficulties. The is not to deny the socioeconomic pressure caused by the presence of Syrian refugees as well as other displaced communities in Lebanon. However, it becomes quite evident that the FPM has greater political objectives in mind to scapegoat Syrian refugees and deflect their responsibility and the discontent of the Lebanese population onto this vulnerable population.

Historically President Aoun has changed alliances and formed strategies to remain relevant within Lebanon and reinforce the support of his predominately Christian base. As shown in the case study, the FPM has often adopted changes that were averse to their main secular principles but framed as *necessary* for their *survival* within the complex local and regional divisions of power. This has also been replicated in the way they chose to deal with Syrian refugees as security threats. With Lebanon passing through one of the worst financial and economic crises

in its history, the FPM, having a sizeable bloc in Parliament and a grip over executive decisions, could not do much about it. Whether or not the FPM is to blame is not the focus of this study, but it can be inferred that to maintain their control over the Christian community and mask their political failures internally, the FPM has resorted to the securitization phenomenon. In other terms, the FPM has used the securitization of Syrian refugees as a mode of governmentality, manifested through a multitude of surveillance techniques, restrictive practices and an ongoing discourse on the harm caused by this supposed "adversary" of the Lebanese polity. It is as Bigo (2002), describes a *ban-opticon* in which surveillance technologies selectively pick who needs to be put under surveillance, in order to play with the fears of the people and target potentially dangerous minorities. This in return allows the ruling elite, in this case the FPM, to reaffirm their pastoral power.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this study has sought to demonstrate how Lebanon is operating within the global context involving tensions surrounding migration movements. Examining Lebanon through lens of securitization theory has been very essential, especially given that the securitized group are former citizens of its long-term ally and neighboring country – Syria. Securitization has always been prominent in the West, but with the instigation of the Syrian refugee crisis, many studies have evolved to examine its practice in the MENA region. Hence why, this study contributed to showcasing the significance of the sociological approach to securitization in a context such as Lebanon. Nevertheless, to limit the study's scope, the study focused on the primary agents of securitization in Lebanon – the Free Patriotic Movement. Their efforts to securitize Syrian refugee presence were quite blatant as seen by the above media mapping and the discourses voiced primarily by their leader Gebran Bassil. Audience receptivity in Lebanon, especially that of the Christian populace, has been quite evident with Syrian refugee securitization. The government adopted stringent measures that created an environment conducive to the refoulement of Syrian refugees and often practiced refoulement which is in direct contravention of International Humanitarian Law.

This study has attempted to demonstrate that the receptiveness of the Lebanese population is rooted in their historical experience with Palestinian refugees, the Syrian tutelage and later on Syrian military interventions. The present paper does not deny the socioeconomic strain caused by the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon; however, the securitizing, critical discourse has exacerbated their impact which raises important questions such as the research question guiding this study: "Why does the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) in Lebanon choose to securitize the Syrian refugee crisis?" Building on Bigo (2002)'s link between security and immigration, this paper then demonstrated that the power positions of the FPM has allowed them to use securitization as a political technology to control and scapegoat the referent groups. Consequently, the FPM appear as protectors of the polity and most prominently, the Christian populace, while simultaneously masking their political failures internally and scapegoating Syrian refugees. It is thus a mode of governmentality which plays with the unease of populations and associates their freedom at its limits with danger and security. Finally, the

limitations of this study include the inability to study securitization by all prominent political parties, but rather focusing on the FPM securitization and extending its implications on the Lebanese state as a whole. This projection has helped structure the study, but it also limits its generality. Moreover, there has been a limited media mapping of the securitized speech acts which did not focus on all of the FPM members. Hence, future research is needed to focus specifically on speech acts and enrich the body of literature available on securitization and its implications.

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