
THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN LEBANON

Lebanese Securitization of Syrian Refugees since 2011

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by using securitization theory with a sociological approach, to determine the extent and success of securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and mass migration of Syrians in 2011. By analyzing Lebanese history and context, and the securitizing speech acts and policy performed by government and media, the extent, success, and impact of securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is demonstrated. The lack of comprehensive migration policy by the Lebanese government in combination with the greater political objectives of Lebanese politicians, has created an environment of highly politicized and securitized rhetoric regarding Syrian refugees. The collective history and current day context of life in Lebanon has made the Lebanese public highly receptive to such narratives, ultimately facilitating the continuance of such discourse throughout Lebanese social and political arenas. This research finds that the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been quite successful due to the overlap and intersection of several sociocultural and historical factors, along with the dynamic between different actors in the securitization process. This paper concludes that despite the framing of Syrian refugees as social and national security threats, the securitization of this population is largely performed by political elite for greater political purposes, rather than legitimate concern for security. The Government of Lebanon has effectively used Syrian refugees as a scapegoat for social malcontent surrounding longstanding governance and development issues, and has leveraged its role as a host to secure international funding.

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1. Introduction

Research Questions and Relevance

With the global increase in civil wars and geopolitical conflict following the Cold War era, migration shifted from an “immigration” focus, to one of security for states. Through political discursive construction, the migration of individuals fleeing war-torn or unstable countries has been framed as an existential threat to national security, as well as an affront to identity. This securitization of migration has been conducted by government officials, social elite, and the media in countries facing an influx of migrants. The intersection of security and migration studies emerged in the context of a highly interconnected world, fueled by the processes of globalization.¹ The theory of securitization’s foundation in constructivist thought allows for a comprehensive analysis of migration as a security threat.

The securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and its impact on Lebanese society and migrants will be examined by using securitization as a theoretical framework. Incorporating Balzacq’s sociological approach to securitization, will allow a broader examination of the process of securitization in the Lebanese context. This will be done through analysis of speech acts, sociocultural and historical context, the dynamic between different actors in the securitization process, and other contributing factors that ultimately facilitate the successful securitization of refugees in this case. Securitization theory with a sociological approach is a useful framework to use as it not only provides an understanding of the intricacies of successful securitization of vulnerable populations, but also provides a more comprehensive understanding

¹ Fiona B. Adamson, “Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 167.

of how the strategies and policies of the government function toward the broader objectives of those in power.

Lebanon is worth focusing on as it has traditionally been a destination for migrants and refugees throughout the Middle East. Notably, throughout its history it has accepted Palestinian refugees in large numbers, and is currently hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees since 2011. Today, Lebanon hosts upwards of 1.5 million Syrian refugees² and up to 500,000 Palestinian refugees.³ Approximately 1 in 4 people are a refugee in Lebanon,⁴ whereas in Canada, there is 1 refugee per every 2,000 Canadians.⁵ This illustrates the severity of the migration and refugee crisis in Lebanon and the relevance of examining this particular case.

The guiding questions for this paper are: To what extent has migration become securitized in Lebanon since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011? What factors have fueled the securitization of Syrian refugees and migrants? To what extent has the migration of Syrian refugees been framed and perceived as a security threat in Lebanon? This paper will argue that the successful securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been facilitated by overlapping socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental factors that have created a frustrated and fearful audience, and therefore a receptive audience to securitizing acts, in the form of the Lebanese population. This has allowed the Lebanese government to effectively label the refugees as an existential threat to the identity, cohesion, and security of the state. In turn, this has resulted in the use of harmful emergency measures to deal with the refugee population,

² Human Rights Watch, World Report – Lebanon, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/lebanon>.

³ UNRWA, Where We Work, retrieved from <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>

⁴ Dina Eldawy, “A Fragile Situation: Will the Syrian refugee swell Push Lebanon Over the Edge?” February 21, 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugee-swell-push-lebanon-over-edge>.

⁵ Patrick Cain, “These 14 countries have taken more refugees than Canada,” Global News, September 20, 2016, retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/2951263/these-14-countries-have-taken-more-refugees-than-canada/>.

with the pretence of protecting the Lebanese population. Utilizing securitization theory to examine the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon can provide an understanding of how smaller, low capacity nations like Lebanon are operating in the international context of wider tensions surrounding global migration, as seen in Europe. By examining this issue through the lens of securitization theory, it is made evident that the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is above all else, a move by political elite to establish more power and control in political and social arenas. Securitizing refugees has worked toward the objective of deflecting social malcontent for the broad range of development and governance issues Lebanese citizens face, as well as the objective of securing much needed development funding from the international community. In this way, despite the rhetoric and policy that frames Syrian refugees as national and social security threats, the securitization of this population is less about national or social security but more about achieving broader political objectives. This securitization has ultimately influenced the perceptions of the Lebanese public, increased tensions between the Lebanese population and Syrian refugees, and has resulted in human rights abuses and protection gaps for both groups.

This paper is divided into 7 sections. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature that will make up the foundation of the arguments made in this paper. Specifically, Chapter 2 reviews the Copenhagen School's securitization framework, criticisms of this framework, the securitization of migration, and a more sociological framework of securitization centered on the work of Thierry Balzacq. Chapter 3 provides an overview of Lebanese history and context, and the various relevant factors that influence the Lebanese public's receptiveness to securitizing speech acts and policy. This section will outline the significance of Lebanese identity and perspectives, formed by the country's collective history with civil war and refugee populations,

as well as the current economic and environmental conditions of the country. Chapter 4 examines the process of securitization of refugees in Lebanon, by looking at the securitizing speech acts and policy performed by government and media. Chapter 5 examines the national and international migration and refugee covenants and policy at work (or not) in the Lebanese context, and what role if any this has had in protecting the rights of refugees and preventing securitization. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the implications of securitization for Syrian refugees, the Lebanese population, and the international community. Chapter 7 concludes the paper by providing concluding remarks and an assessment of the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and whether their presence in Lebanon warrants the framing used to portray them as a threat.

2. Literature Review

Theory of Securitization

The Copenhagen School

Securitization theory transpired in the 1980s with the amplification of questions surrounding the concept of security following the Cold War. The works of Waever, Buzan, and de Wilde made up the core of the Copenhagen School of security studies, from which the theory of securitization emerged. These scholars sought to expand on security studies dominated by the state-centric realist framework that concentrated on threats in the form of military conflict. The Copenhagen School broadened the concept of security by considering not only state security, but societal security. This allowed for a shift in focus from the state, to society as the referent object

for security.⁶ According to Wæver et al., societal security is “about identity, about the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community.”⁷ Related to the concept of societal security is the notion that a society will fail to exist if it is unable to protect its identity.⁸

The Copenhagen School’s framework of securitization focuses on the processes through which security threats are created. Securitization is the process through which an actor successfully justifies the use of exceptional measures to address a particular issue, by framing it as an existential threat. Specifically, the Copenhagen school defines securitization as “positioning through speech acts of a particular issue as a threat to survival, which in turn enables emergency measures and the suspension of *normal politics* in dealing with an issue.”⁹ Securitization theory is founded in language theory, seen through the role of “speech acts,” which emphasize the discursive and performative nature of securitization.

Wæver, Buzan, and de Wilde identify three units of analysis for their theory of securitization: referent objects (things facing existential threat); securitizing actors (those declaring a referent object is existentially threatened); and functional actors (those who have influence in the security field).¹⁰ A securitizing actor produces a speech act to frame a subject or issue as an existential threat to the safety of a referent object. The speech act or ‘securitizing move’ alone does not result in securitization, it is the acceptance of the securitizing speech act by

⁶ Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, and Pierre Lemaitre, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, (London: Pinter Publishers, 1993), 23.

⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁸ Ole Wæver, “Securitization and desecuritization,” in Ronnie D. Lipschultz, ed., *On Security* (pp. 46–86), (New York, NY: Columbia University Press 1995): 67.

⁹ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A new Framework for Analysis*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 1998), 78.

¹⁰ Buzan et al., *Security: A new Framework for Analysis*, 36.

the audience that results in securitization.¹¹ Here it is evident that the audience plays a crucial role in the process of securitization, and is largely responsible for the success or failure of a securitizing act. If a threat or securitizing speech act is not accepted by the audience, then the securitizing agent will not be successful in legitimizing the use of exceptional measures to address that socially constructed threat. Therefore, the securitization of an issue occurs only “if and when the audience accepts it as such.”¹²

Successful securitization (acceptance of the securitizing act by the audience) is dependent on three factors. First, the securitizing claim must abide by the securitization process, whereby an issue or subject is framed as an existential threat.¹³ The second condition of success refers to the power dynamics between the securitizing agent and the audience. Buzan et. al emphasize that the success of a securitizing claim depends on the social capital and authority held by the securitizing agent.¹⁴ The final condition of success identified by Buzan et. al., is the plausibility of the threat.¹⁵ The reality of these factors and the subsequent acceptance of the securitizing act by the audience ultimately facilitates and justifies the use of exceptional measures by the securitizing agent executing the speech act.

Securitization of Migration

Political discourse and the securitization of migration has shifted international consideration of migrants and refugees from a humanitarian frame into one of security. This discourse has in turn shaped state policy regarding immigration and asylum, in which the humanitarian concerns of individuals entering a country are replaced with the perception of this

¹¹ Ibid., 25-31.

¹² Ibid., 25.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

migration as a security threat to the wellbeing of citizens and the state as a whole. While the migrant issue has been highly politicized in recent times, with significant media coverage framing the narrative in terms of insecurity, international migration has always been perceived and understood as a potentially destabilizing factor. The civil wars of the 1990s and the subsequent migration of millions of people had regional and international political, economic, and social implications, that shaped the security agendas of receiving states.¹⁶ The securitization of migration is an expression of the link between migration and terrorism, the globalization of security, and the attempts to handle new international crime and terrorism threats following 9/11.¹⁷ In Europe, discussions on migration and security began to focus on the securitization of asylum, and concerns about the burden of refugees and migrants on national identity and stability, amplified.¹⁸ These narratives ultimately resulted in the securitization of highly vulnerable populations, who were perceived to be the source of indirect or direct threats, in various forms, including acts of terrorism or economic, demographic, and societal destabilization. Lohrmann notes that while migration can pose a risk to stability, real and perceived threats regarding migration must be distinguished, as “fears about immigration are often exaggerated, but perceptions impact policies seeking to constrain migration issues.”¹⁹

In this way, the securitization of migration is highly political and often founded in unbiased assumptions and fears regarding the unwanted group in the host country. As Huysmans articulates, immigrants and refugees are often portrayed as endangering a collective way of life, and the attitudes developed behind this are encouraged by intensifying alienation and fear,

¹⁶ Reinhard Lohrmann, “Migrants, refugees, and insecurity,” *International Migration* 38, no. 4 (2000): 4.

¹⁷ Michael Humphrey, “Migration, Security, and Insecurity,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 34, no. 2 (2013): 179.

¹⁸ Gil Loescher and James Milner, “Security implications of protracted refugee situations,” *The Adelphi Papers* 45, no. 375 (2005): 29.

¹⁹ Lohrmann, “Migrants refugees, and insecurity,” 6.

thereby establishing a stronger sense of unity and collective identity among the host community facing this perceived existential threat.²⁰ In this case, framing migration as an existential threat is a political act “that asserts and reproduces the unity of a political community.”²¹ Bigo posits that “the relation between security and migration is fully and immediately political,” arguing that the term “migrant” itself labels someone as a threat to the core values and institutions of the state.²² This politicization by elites facilitates the securitization of migration. Society’s elite fabricate truths regarding state security by connecting migrants to issues of crime, instability, and unemployment in order to further their own political agenda.²³

Such securitization has consequences for the human security of migrants and asylum-seekers in receiving countries, as this type of securitizing discourse ultimately frames their predicament in terms of security, rather than humanitarianism and protection of human rights.

Criticisms of the Copenhagen School’s Securitization Theory

There are several criticisms directed at the Copenhagen School’s theory of securitization. It has been argued that characterizing securitization solely as a discursive practice undermines the central role of bureaucratic routines that permit securitization. Securitization is not only enabled by speech acts, but by various administrative security practices undertaken by security professionals to “affirm their roles as providers of protection and security and to mask some of their failures,” thereby “managing” unease.²⁴ Theorists of the Paris School highlight the possibility of the institutionalization of security threats, and place more focus on networks of

²⁰ Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006), 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²² Didier Bigo, “Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease,” *Alternatives, Special Issue*, 27 (2002): 71.

²³ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

security professionals, “the systems of meaning they generate, and the productive power of their practices” rather than the Copenhagen school’s concentration on speech acts and exceptional measures.²⁵ The framework’s focus on language is also considered problematic in that it undermines the role of other factors of securitization, such as the use of images.²⁶

The Copenhagen School suggests that security is formulated by those with institutional power. This ultimately marginalizes the experiences and perception of security by the “powerless,” depicting them as passive audience members who simply acquiesce or reject the elite’s securitizing speech acts.²⁷ This ties into a primary criticism raised by theorists, which is that the Copenhagen School concept of the audience’s role in the process of securitization is poorly developed. The theory’s focus on the speech act may be to blame for its downplay of the role of the audience in the securitization process.²⁸ Another major criticism is that the Copenhagen School fails to fully consider contextual factors in the securitization process, such as “dominant narratives of identity...that condition both patterns of securitization and the broader construction of security.”²⁹ Additionally, the framework does not explicitly recognize that the particular setting enables or constrains the securitizing act, as well as the acceptance of the act by the audience.³⁰ Some of these major criticisms are addressed by undertaking a sociological approach to securitization, which will be the framework applied in this paper to evaluate the securitization of migration and Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

²⁵ C.A.S.E Collective, “Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto,” *Security Dialogue* 37 no. 4 (2006): 458.

²⁶ Michael C. Williams, “Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 47, (2003): 511-531; and Frank Möller “Photographic Interventions in Post-9/11 Security Policy,” *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007): 179-196.

²⁷ Matt McDonald, “Securitization and the Construction of Security,” *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 574.

²⁸ Thierry Balzacq, “The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context,” *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 2 (2005): 171-201.

²⁹ McDonald, “Securitization and the Construction of Security,” 571.

³⁰ Mark B. Salter, “Securitization and Desecuritization: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.” *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 no. 4, (2008): 328.

A Sociological Approach to Securitization

As outlined above, some of the key downfalls of the Copenhagen School's framework of securitization are its lack of consideration of context and its focus on speech acts. In response to these weaknesses, some scholars have applied a more sociological approach to the process of securitization. Such a method to securitization is ultimately a more holistic approach, allowing for the consideration of social, cultural, political, and historical context that is required to examine the securitization of refugees. Balzacq argues that the audience, political agency, and the context are three crucial and often overlooked aspects of securitization, that should guide the examination of the linguistic construction of threats in international politics.³¹ In his application of the securitization framework, he places security in the social context, emphasizing the importance of considering the authority of the securitizing agent, the social identity that influences the securitizing actor, and the nature of the target audience. Balzacq suggests that in order to optimize securitization theory, it must be approached with a socio-philosophical view.

Balzacq outlines three major differences between the philosophical approach undertaken by the Copenhagen School and the more sociological stance he proposes. First, the philosophical approach reduces securitization to "conventional procedure" whereby conditions of a successful speech act must be met in order for the securitization act to fully occur.³² The sociological framework argues that "securitization is better understood as a strategic (pragmatic) process that occurs within, and as part of, a configuration of circumstances, including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both the speaker and listener bring to the

³¹ Balzacq, "The three faces of securitization," 173.

³² Thierry Balzacq, *Securitization theory: how security problems emerge and dissolve*, (New York: Routledge, 2011): 1.

interaction.”³³ In this way, Balzacq replaces the Copenhagen School’s self-referential focus on the speech act, with a pragmatic approach that more effectively integrates the audience, the context, and political agency.

Second, the sociological approach views performatives as situated actions shaped by the habitus of agents, which guides their perceptions and behaviour.³⁴ This is not a factor used by the Copenhagen School in its application of the securitization framework. Third, Balzacq highlights the difference between the two approaches in terms of the audience. In contrast to the Copenhagen School’s idea that the audience is a receptive, formally provided category, the sociological model emphasizes the similar composition and role of securitizing actors and audiences.³⁵ Balzacq argues that these three main factors provide a new approach in which securitization can be understood: “Securitization can be discursive and non-discursive; intentional and non-intentional; performative but not ‘an act in itself.’”³⁶

Balzacq shifts the focus in the securitization framework from speech acts to the use of policy tools and actions in the process of securitization. This strengthens the theory of securitization by explicitly recognizing that securitization does not only occur through speech acts, but can also happen through securitizing actions, performed through state policy. Additionally, contrary to the Copenhagen School, Balzacq stresses the importance of recognizing that there cannot be a separation between “normal” and “exceptional” politics in the process of securitization. Balzacq suggests the need to highlight how “security and politics (re)define, and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

constantly enter into each other's orbits," emphasizing that security is not beyond or separate from politics.³⁷

A sociological approach to securitization has been taken by other scholars, including Bigo, Bourbeau, and Salter. By considering securitization within particular fields, Bigo emphasizes the need to recognize the day-to-day routines and practices of bureaucracies in order to understand how securitizing discourse operates in practice.³⁸ Bigo suggests that successful securitization is the result of power dynamics and institutional struggles to manage the framing of discourse. Bourbeau examines the social construction of migration as a security threat in France following the end of the Cold War. He emphasizes that securitizing acts are socio-historically informed, and he highlights the co-existence of uncustomary security speech acts and routinized security practices in the securitization of migration in France.³⁹ Through a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, Salter argues that securitizing acts occur within a variety of sociological contexts that function with unique norms and practices.⁴⁰ He suggests that there are four distinct settings that explain the form and success of speech acts: the popular, the elite, the technocratic, and the scientific.⁴¹ Each of these settings dictates who the securitizing agents are, who the audience is, and what can be securitized within that particular social context.

The three primary components that make up the structure of Balzacq's sociological method are: the centrality of audience; the co-dependency of agency and context; and the

³⁷ Thierry Balzacq, "The 'Essence' of securitization: Theory, ideal type, and a sociological science of security." *International Relations* 29, no. 1 (2015): 108.

³⁸ Bigo, "Security and Immigration," 73.

³⁹ Philippe Bourbeau, "Moving Forward Together" Logics of the Securitisation Process," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 43, no.1 (2014): 187-206.

⁴⁰ Salter, "Securitization and Desecuritization," 321.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

structuring force of various tools and practices.⁴² Guided by this framework, Chapter 3 will examine the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by first providing an overview of the Lebanese history and context, including consideration of the Lebanese public as the audience. With the country's historical and social context in mind, Chapter 4 will examine the security speech acts, practices, and tools used primarily by the Lebanese government in its securitization of Syrian refugees.

3. Lebanese History and Context

Analysis of the Lebanese context in terms of the relationship between Syria and Lebanon, and Lebanon's sociopolitical environment will provide an understanding of the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon since 2011. It will be demonstrated how Lebanon-Syria relations historically, have created a particular sociocultural context that has facilitated the success of securitization. Examination of the context will highlight the most significant securitizing actors, the audience, and the various securitizing speech acts and policy within a holistic framework. This will illustrate the dynamic between relevant actors in the securitizing process, as well as the facilitating factors that have enabled securitization. In these ways, analysis will be taken beyond the "speech act" for a better understanding of how and why the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has taken place.

The Lebanese Civil War and Syrian Intervention

Consideration of the Lebanese Civil War is particularly important in order to understand the history between Lebanon and Syria, and the entrenchment of Syria in Lebanese politics and

⁴² Ibid., 3.

society. Historically, Syrian political elite have viewed Lebanon as part of ‘Greater Syria’ under French colonial rule, up to and beyond establishment of Lebanon’s independence in 1943. Following its independence, many political parties and religious groups challenged the validity of the country’s confessional system. Sectarian tensions fueled by this and other religious grievances, as well as foreign intervention, helped fuel the Lebanese civil war that erupted in 1975. Syria was a prominent intervenor, playing a large role in the conflict by financing and arming militias, many of which came to hold more power than the government. The most notable was Hezbollah, which to this day holds a great amount of authority in the country, and is a reflection of Syria’s continued patronage and influence on Lebanese politics. The presence and power of Hezbollah continues to be a point of contention for many Lebanese citizens. Syrian authority over Lebanese internal politics and the decision-making process undermined the implementation of the Ta’if Agreement, which was signed in 1989 to end the civil war.

An increase in Lebanese nationalism and subsequent anti-Syrian attitudes in the late nineties and early 2000s manifested in the Christian and Sunni March 14 political alliance that pushed for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.⁴³ Syrian intervention in the Lebanese post-war transition was expected to last only a few years following the end of the civil war, but persisted beyond the two year expectation. The Syrian army only completely withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, under intense international pressure. This pressure was heightened at the time due to the assassination of former PM Rafic Hariri, which Syrian authorities were blamed for. Relations between the Lebanese PM and Syrian president Bashar al-Assad deteriorated in 2004, when Syria politically domineered the extension of pro-Syrian Emile Lahoud’s presidential term.⁴⁴

⁴³ Filippo Dionigi, “Rethinking Borders: The Case of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon,” *Refugees and Migration Movements in the Middle East*, March (2017): 23.

⁴⁴ Ohannes Geukjian, Geukjian, Ohannes. “Political Instability and Conflict after the Syrian Withdrawal from Lebanon.” *The Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (2014): 524.

These events exacerbated existing suspicion and resentment toward Syrian authorities among various factions within Lebanese civil and political society.

Lebanon and the Palestinians

Understanding Lebanon's experience with refugees, particularly Palestinian refugees, will also clarify the nature of securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon today. Fears that Syrian refugees will become permanent fixtures in the country like the Palestinians, has been an enabling factor in the acceptance of the perception that Syrian refugees are a social and national security threat.

Not long after its independence in 1943, Lebanon faced an influx of more than 120,000 Palestinian refugees following the 1948 Nakba, with the number increasing every year as the conflict between Israel and Palestine continued.⁴⁵ The growing power of Palestinian armed militias and the financial and political influence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) caused increasing tension between secular groups and political parties within Lebanon, and culminated in the controversial Cairo Agreement, which granted administrative autonomy to the Palestinian refugee camps, lifted the ban on employment, and allowed the use of Lebanese bases for attacks on Israel.⁴⁶ This created fear and resentment among many Lebanese, particularly Christians, who believed these allowances put Lebanon's sovereignty at risk. In post-war Lebanon, the perceived role of the Palestinians in the death and destruction of Lebanese life and society during the Civil War, was overwhelming. The "Palestinian cause" became the "Palestinian problem" and many began to call for refusal of granting civil and political rights,

⁴⁵ Tom Russell, "A Lebanon Primer," *Merip Reports* 133, (1985):18.

⁴⁶ Zeina Halabi, "Exclusion and Identity in Lebanon's Palestinian Camps: A Story of Sustained Conflict," *Environment and Urbanization* 16, no. 2 (2004): 40.

especially after the repeal of the Cairo Agreement.⁴⁷ Palestinians were denied work permits and banned from several professions, which meant that many Palestinian children had no access to school, as Palestinians could not enroll their children if they were unemployed.⁴⁸

Bitterness surrounding the circumstances of the war and the role of the PLO remain to this day, and is seen through the violation of civil and human rights and discrimination against the roughly 450,000 registered Palestinians living in Lebanon.⁴⁹ Discourse regarding Palestinian refugees following the Lebanese civil war was highly political and securitizing. These refugees were framed as a destabilizing factor to the country's confessional system, which held a fragile balance between the Christian and Muslim population.⁵⁰ Lebanese political elite argued that granting civil and social rights to Palestinians would result in their permanent settlement in Lebanon, which would be highly destabilizing and could be seen as a sort of political concession to Israel.⁵¹ This discourse was spread and accepted by both elites and the general Lebanese public.

Lebanon's economy and the labour market

Lebanon has been entrenched in economic disaster for years, and this has only worsened with recent conditions. Prior to the refugee crisis the working population in Lebanon whether Lebanese, Palestinian, or Syrian, faced poor working conditions characterized by low wages, long working hours, inconsistent and unreliable availability of work, and a lack of employee

⁴⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ UNRWA, Where We Work, <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>.

⁵⁰ Agnes Czajka, "Discursive Constructions of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: from the Israel-Hezbollah war to the struggle over Nahr al-Bared." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 1 (2012): 243.

⁵¹ Ibid., 244.

benefits.⁵² Child employment and exploitation was also common. Lebanon has one of the world's heaviest debt burdens⁵³ and has been plagued by a high unemployment rate.⁵⁴ According to the World Bank, the country needs to create six times as many jobs as it currently can, in order to absorb the roughly 23,000 Lebanese nationals that enter the work force every year.⁵⁵ The Lebanese economy is largely dependent on "royalties" from real estate and financial markets, and other sectors that do not meet the demand for jobs.⁵⁶ The country's economy has seen a reduction in growth since 2009 due to political and regional instability.⁵⁷ This economic downturn has been accelerated by the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis, which have had a negative impact on economic growth. This has resulted in a reduction in foreign investment and tourism and poor provision of government service in all sectors, including education and health.

The influx of Syrian refugees into the Lebanese labour market has exacerbated an already delicate situation. The livelihood, employment, and human rights needs of Lebanese and foreign workers were not being met prior to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the subsequent migration of Syrians to Lebanon. As a result, some Lebanese have harboured resentment toward the Syrian population, arguing that they are taking much needed employment from Lebanese

⁵² Salem Ajluni and Mary Kawar, "Towards Decent Work in Lebanon: Issues and Challenges in Light of the Syrian Refugee Crisis," International Labour Organization (ILO), Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_374826.pdf, (2015): 39.

⁵³ Reuters, "Lebanese PM: new budget start of 'a long road' to economic safety," May 26, 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-budget/lebanese-pm-new-budget-start-of-a-long-road-to-economic-safety-idUSKCN1SW06M>.

⁵⁴ Nada Andraos Aziz, "Report: Alarming figures on unemployment in Lebanon," LBC Group, May 6, 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/news-bulletin-reports/314820/report-alarming-figures-on-unemployment-in-lebanon/en>.

⁵⁵ Middle East Monitor, "Lebanon FM slammed for 'racist' Tweet," June 11, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190611-lebanon-fm-slammed-for-racist-tweet/>.

⁵⁶ Hicham Abou Jaoude, "Labour Market and Employment Policy in Lebanon," *European Training Foundation* (2015), Retrieved from https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/33A1850E6A358308C1257DFF005942FE_Employment%20policies_Lebanon.pdf: 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

nationals, for a lower wage. The Lebanese government has implemented policies to restrict the ability of Syrian refugees to work in Lebanon since 2011, but with limited enforcement due to capacity constraints. In January 2017, Lebanon's labour minister Mohammad Kabbara announced that the state would begin cracking down on foreign labour in the country, to ensure that working foreigners had the proper permits and were not competing with the Lebanese workforce.⁵⁸

Environmental crisis

Another key contextual factor to consider in the process of securitization in Lebanon, is the state of the country's environment, which plays a significant role in the wellbeing of its citizens. Lebanon has been on the brink of ecological collapse for quite some time. The country has a poor environmental record, with environmental policy taking a backseat to priorities surrounding economic growth and development. This is to be somewhat expected, considering the issue of persistent sectarian violence and political instability, as well as regional wars and foreign interference. Nonetheless, Lebanon's failure to implement effective environmental policy and failure to address structural weaknesses contributing to degradation of the environment, has come to a head. The environmental situation has become unbearable for Lebanese citizens, and has been exacerbated by the large Syrian refugee population. The government's failure to address environmental issues has increased the Lebanese population's negative perception of Syrian refugees.

⁵⁸ Josh Wood, "Syrian refugees squeezed out of livelihoods in Lebanon," *The National*. March 20, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/world/syrian-refugees-squeezed-out-of-livelihoods-in-lebanon-1.642725>.

With an area of 10, 452 square kilometres, Lebanon is the smallest country in the Middle East, yet as of 2014 was the host of 37% of the region's Syrian refugees.⁵⁹ With the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Lebanon's population jumped from just over 4 million in 2011 to 6.2 million as of July 2017.⁶⁰ This increase in population reflects an accelerated growth that was not expected until 2041, and has resulted in an increased burden on already fragile environmental resources in the country.⁶¹ Estimates put the production of waste by refugees at 40,000 tons per year since 2012, which has led to a significant increase in pollution.⁶² Such an increase in waste production adds strain to a state that could not properly manage the collection of waste before the refugees arrived. Due to mismanagement, corruption, and poor governance, a deal with landfill managers fell through in 2015, resulting in 850 million tonnes of garbage collecting on the streets and beaches of Beirut.⁶³ In response to the crisis much of the garbage has been thrown into the sea or burned, creating significant air and water pollution.⁶⁴

In rural areas, the influx of refugees has doubled the population of some communities, and has created environmental hazards. Refugees are living among sewage and trash, dumpsites and burning waste are posing health and safety risks, and sewage is flowing into irrigation canals connected to vegetable fields.⁶⁵ The large additional waste production from Syrian refugees runs

⁵⁹ Energy and Environment Programme UNDP, "Lebanon Environmental Assessment of the Syrian Conflict & Priority Interventions," retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/lebanon/docs/Energy%20and%20Environment/Publications/EASC-WEB.pdf>, (2014): 1.

⁶⁰ The World Factbook, "Middle East: Lebanon," Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>.

⁶¹ Energy and Environment Programme UNDP, "Lebanon Environmental Assessment of the Syrian Conflict," 1.

⁶² Ibid., 40.

⁶³ CBC, "Lebanese government responds to mounting trash crisis by 'dumping it all in the sea,'" October 18, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-thursday-edition-1.4868294/lebanese-government-responds-to-mounting-trash-crisis-by-dumping-it-all-in-the-sea-1.4863225>.

⁶⁴ Sophia Smith Galer, "Lebanon is drowning in its own waste," BBC, March 28, 2018, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180328-lebanon-is-drowning-in-its-own-waste>.

⁶⁵ Ellen Francis, "In Lebanese town, mounting trash shows strain of refugees," Reuters, March 31, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-refugees/in-lebanese-town-mounting-trash-shows-strain-of-refugees-idUSKBN1721Q7>.

the risk of contaminating water, air, and soil, through the leaching of contaminants in open dumps and the burning of the waste by citizens and authorities. The influx of refugees has resulted in a great depletion of water resource and quality, and an increase in the emissions of nitrogen dioxide by 10%, due to the increased use of generators for electricity.⁶⁶ These burdens to the Lebanese environment are a result of the state's incapacity to withstand such a large influx of people, and these developments are adversely affecting the refugee population, the Lebanese population, and Lebanon's wildlife and ecosystems.

The increased overpopulation, resource consumption, and waste production of a country with already very high population density and lack of natural resources, has contributed to heightened concern and action by environmental groups. The Litani River Authority bulldozed and evicted the informal settlements of at least 1,500 Syrian refugees as part of its anti-pollution campaign in 2019.⁶⁷ Environmental concerns and the issue of pollution have been longstanding unaddressed problems in Lebanon, and conveniently feed into the securitizing speech acts and policy of Lebanese government officials regarding the refugee crisis.

Lebanese identity and attitudes

Taking into consideration the history between Lebanon and Syria, the Lebanese experience with Palestinian refugees, and the socioeconomic and environmental context, it is useful to now examine Lebanese identity and attitudes towards Syrian refugees today. As an audience, the Lebanese population has been responsive to securitizing acts made by securitizing agents, due to a number of sociopolitical and psychocultural factors. As illustrated in the

⁶⁶ Energy and Environment Programme UNDP, "Lebanon Environmental Assessment of the Syrian Conflict," 104.

⁶⁷ Anchal Vohra, "Dozens of Syrian refugees evicted in Lebanon anti-pollution drive," Al Jazeera, April 27, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/dozens-syrian-refugees-evicted-lebanon-anti-pollution-drive-190427180746074.html>.

previous sections, the Lebanese population's view of Syrian refugees is largely influenced by the country's history. Many Lebanese fear that the Syrian refugees will become permanent fixtures in their society, just as the Palestinian refugees did, following 1948. This is particularly alarming for Lebanon's Christian and Shia populations, which worry that the permanent residency of the mostly Sunni Syrian refugees would offset the very fragile demographic balance established by the country's confessional system of governance.⁶⁸

Social tensions between Lebanese and Syrians has led to prejudice by both against the other. These predispositions are shaped by the political history between the two parties, and the sectarian dynamics between and within these populations.⁶⁹ Longstanding grievances surrounding Syrian occupation of Lebanon have re-emerged due to the current Syrian refugee situation in Lebanon, with some describing this context as a "new occupation."⁷⁰ Lebanese attitudes toward Syrian refugees has been negative and increasingly so, as the prospect of their return to Syria dwindles. In 2013, a study found that the large majority of 900 Lebanese nationals perceived the impact of Syrian refugees negatively, with 52% of respondents stating that Syrian refugees posed a threat to national security and stability, and 71% agreeing it was very likely that sectarian violence would break out.⁷¹ Of this national sample, 98% believed that Syrian refugees were taking jobs from the Lebanese, and 90% agreed that "the Syrian crisis is hurting Lebanese

⁶⁸ Care International, "Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Eight Years On: What works and why that matters for the future," (2018): 4.

⁶⁹ Saferworld, "Building peace into refugee responses: Syrian refugees in Lebanon," retrieved from <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1172-building-peace-into-refugee-responses-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon>, (2018): 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mona Christophersen, Jing Liu, Cathrine Thorleifsson, and Age Arild Tiltnes, "Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees and the Syrian crisis: Results from a national poll implemented 15-21 May 2013," Fafo (2013): 6.

goods and businesses.”⁷² Percentages were higher for all questions for respondents in the North and the Bekaa, where refugees have settled in the largest numbers.

Lebanese nationals apparently do not feel as safe as they did before the influx of Syrian refugees into their communities. A study of 1200 Lebanese citizens nationwide found that over 50% of them did not feel safe, but only 13% of them reported assaults, with the majority of citizens simply having “heard stories” from others about attacks by Syrian refugees.⁷³ Lebanese report less assaults but express more feeling of unsafety which reflects a perceptual problem among the population, likely caused by the securitization of Syrian refugees through institutional, media, and social communication.⁷⁴ The international support directed to Syrian refugees in Lebanon has also contributed to the tension between Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees. Many Lebanese feel that Syrian refugees are unfairly being offered more support by the international community, when they themselves are suffering from poverty. A 2018 UNDP survey showed that 85% of Lebanese felt that international aid was only benefitting Syrians, and that vulnerable Lebanese populations had been overlooked.⁷⁵ Another reflection of the Lebanese public’s views on Syrian refugees is a petition with over 25,000 signatures demanding Syrian refugees “leave Lebanon and return to safe zones in Syria.”⁷⁶

While these findings are not reflective of the views of all Lebanese, they point to the success of the securitization of Syrian refugees by the Lebanese government. The Lebanese population has largely determined that the refugee crisis is an economic, security, and

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Carole Alsharabati and Jihad Nammour, “Survey on Perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon,” *Institutes Des Sciences Politiques* Université Saint-Joseph, (2015): 26.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁵ Care International, “Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Eight Years On,” 7.

⁷⁶ Change.org, “Syrian refugees to leave Lebanon and return to safe zones in Syria,” petition, retrieved from https://www.change.org/p/us-state-department-syrian-refugees-to-leave-lebanon-and-return-to-safe-zones-in-syria-2?recruiter=719163869&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=autopublish&utm_term=mob-xs-share_petition-reason_msg.

demographic threat. Lebanon is hosting the most refugees per capita, and this fact has been exploited to scapegoat refugees as the main cause of the country's critical state of affairs.⁷⁷ Scapegoating Syrian refugees has become convenient for Lebanon's political elite, as well as the frustrated public, allowing them to deflect their own responsibilities for the social, political, and economic issues the country is facing. The Lebanese public's historical, social, and cultural past and current experiences have made them more susceptible to accepting messages that convey the Syrian refugees as security threats, and this in combination with the government's narrative and approach to the issue has resulted in the successful and fluid securitization of Syrian refugees. The securitizing speech acts and policy actions by those in power in Lebanon will be examined further in the following section.

4. Securitization of Refugees in Lebanon

Displacement and migration is not new to Lebanon however, in the last decade the country has experienced a striking flow of refugees. According to the UN, approximately 6.3 million Syrians have fled Syria since the outbreak of conflict in 2011.⁷⁸ The Government of Lebanon estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million of these Syrian refugees.⁷⁹ This refugee crisis has aggravated pre-existing societal issues in the country, and has posed a significant challenge to the government's capacity overall. In 2018, the Syrian refugee population in

⁷⁷ Halim Shebaya, "Xenophobia will not solve Lebanon's refugee crisis," Al Jazeera, May 31, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/05/xenophobia-solve-lebanons-refugee-crisis-170523092620345.html>.

⁷⁸ UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017," retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017>.

⁷⁹ UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP, "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2018, retrieved from <https://www1.wfp.org/publications/vulnerability-assessment-syrian-refugees-lebanon-vasyr-2018>, (2018): 10.

Lebanon remained to be the highest concentration of refugees per capita, and was the fourth largest refugee population in the world.⁸⁰

The securitization of migration in Lebanon in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis is worth studying, as this migration and subsequent securitization is not comprised of the mass movement of people from a non-European country to a European country, but from one Middle Eastern country to its neighbour, and one with which it shares significant history and culture. Dionigi uses borders as an analytical category and argues that up until 2015, the Lebanese-Syrian border was an illustration of a “thin” border, because its political, economic, cultural, and physical borders encouraged “the flow of people and goods.”⁸¹ Prior to the conflict and mass migration of Syrians into Lebanon, the two countries had significant transnational relations, particularly in terms of their economic interdependence. Over the years Lebanon has benefited economically from its relations with Syria. The country has received thousands of Syrian labour migrants, and Syria continues to be one of the main importers of Lebanese goods.⁸² Lebanon’s economic relations with Syria are entrenched in the 1992 Treaty of Brotherhood and Cooperation⁸³ which has permitted the easy flow of people and goods across the border. The flow of labour migrants across the border was solidified with the 1994 Bilateral Agreement in the Field of Labour,⁸⁴ which outlined cooperation on labour regulations and worked to ensure the rights of workers in both states.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸¹ Dionigi, “Rethinking Borders,” 23.

⁸² Ibid., 23-24.

⁸³ United Nations, “Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic,” Treaty Series, retrieved from https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/LB-SY_910522_TreatyBrotherhoodCooperationCoordination.pdf. (1992).

⁸⁴ Syrian Lebanese Higher Council, “Bilateral Agreement in the Field of Labor between the Government of the Lebanese Republic and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic,” (1994).

This thin border, however, became a more “thick” one with the adoption of new residency policy in 2014, in which borders were essentially closed to Syrians and their presence in Lebanon became regulated. This policy action was framed as a response to the frustrations of the Lebanese public and local authorities who were increasingly affected by the demographic pressure of the Syrian refugee population. It is a reflection of the Lebanese political elite’s marked shift from a narrative of hospitality toward the refugees in the early stages of the migration, to more extreme securitized discourse that aligned with their shifting political interests.

The following subsections will provide an analysis of the securitizing speech acts and policy of Lebanese government officials and the media to illustrate the acceptance of these actions by the audience (the Lebanese public) and therefore the successful securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. As discussed in the literature review, something cannot become securitized unless it is established as a real or perceived threat, and is accepted as such by the target audience. The referent object or that which is being threatened, can be a variety of things including the state (in terms of territory and borders), and the state’s collective identity or culture. In this context, migration is often framed as a threat to the collective identity and society of the host state and its citizens. Anti-refugee and nationalist rhetoric brought forth by Lebanese government and media have effectively marginalized the Syrian refugee population within Lebanese society, and created an environment of fear and resentment for both parties. The acceptance and manifestation of such narratives by Lebanese citizens demonstrates the successful securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These narratives will be explored below.

Securitizing speech acts and policy by government

Securitizing speech acts and policy regarding migration and the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is largely driven by Lebanese politicians and government officials. The political discourse surrounding this topic is almost entirely negative. Lebanon is well acquainted with concerns surrounding migration and refugees, as established in the context section of this paper. The Lebanese government's discourse on the Palestinian refugees has always been highly political and framed in terms of security, just as the discourse on Syrian refugees is now being conducted. Language used by government officials has grown increasingly hostile and placed within the frame of social security. Syrian refugees are being framed as an existential threat to the cultural homogeneity, collective identity, and national security of the country. Much of this narrative has been xenophobic.

Lebanese politicians have consistently blamed Syrian refugees for the multiplicity of issues the country faces. Gebran Bassil, Lebanon's Minister of Foreign Affairs and leader of the largest Christian party in parliament, has been quite outspoken on the issue of Syrian refugees, often making controversial statements. Bassil has explicitly called the Syrian refugees an existential threat to the state.⁸⁵ In 2017 he declared "Any foreigner who is in our country, without us agreeing to it, is an occupier, no matter where they come from,"⁸⁶ and in 2018, he stated that Lebanon does not accept Syrians as refugees, but as "migrants" and "displaced,"

⁸⁵ The Daily Star, "Refugees posing 'existential crisis': Bassil," October 28, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Oct-28/320611-refugees-posing-existential-crisis-bassil.ashx>.

⁸⁶ Marc Daou, "Lebanese leaders divided over fate of Syrian refugees," France 24, October 16, 2017, retrieved from <http://www.france24.com/en/20171016-lebanon-aoun-hariri-hezbollah-return-syrian-refugees>.

while pushing for their repatriation.⁸⁷ More recently he has released a series of controversial tweets. In June 2019, Bassil posted a video of Lebanese protesting a restaurant that hired Syrian workers,⁸⁸ as well as a tweet declaring Lebanese identity above all else, and the importance of a collective refusal to accept refugees and their displacement.⁸⁹ Bassil has been accused of hate speech and criticized for spreading a xenophobic campaign against vulnerable refugees for political purposes. Bassil and supporters of this discourse have argued that these efforts are simply an attempt to put pressure on those violating the labour law, which restricts Syrians' access to jobs.⁹⁰ Adding to this narrative, other politicians have referred to the need to “get rid of” the Syrian issue, and that the refugee crisis is “choking Lebanon.”⁹¹

Domestically and internationally, Prime Minister Saad Hariri has emphasized the large burden the Syrian refugee population has had on the country's limited resources and weak infrastructure. In March 2019, Hariri warned of the consequences of the refugee crisis to Lebanon's stability, and requested \$2.6 billion from the international community at the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, to help support repatriation efforts.⁹² In his speech at this conference, Hariri stressed that the “only solution” to

⁸⁷ Joyce Karam, “Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as ‘refugees,’” The National, September 25, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/world/gebran-bassil-lebanon-does-not-accept-syrians-as-refugees-1.773658>.

⁸⁸ Gebran Bassil, Twitter Post, June 8, 2019, 9:27 AM, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/1137350356931928064.

⁸⁹ Gebran Bassil, Twitter Post, June 7, 2019, 4:07 AM, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/1136907609431314432.

⁹⁰ Kareem Chehayeb, “Anti-Syrian refugee sentiment tamps up in increasingly hostile Lebanon,” Middle East Eye, June 14, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/anti-syrian-refugee-sentiment-ramps-increasingly-unwelcome-lebanon>.

⁹¹ Ruth Sherlock, “In Lebanon, Syrian refugees Met with Harassment and Hostility,” NPR, September 2, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/09/02/547906231/in-lebanon-syrian-refugees-met-with-harassment-and-hostility>.

⁹² The Daily Star, “Hariri requests \$2.6B for Syrian refugee returns,” March 14, 2019, retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Mar-14/478803-hariri-arrives-in-brussels-for-conference-on-refugees-future-of-syria.ashx>.

the refugee crisis is their safe return to Syria.⁹³ President Michel Aoun has communicated on the international stage how “urgent” it is that Syrian refugees are repatriated.⁹⁴ Lebanese officials have called on the international community a number of times for increased support to assist in dealing with the refugee crisis. Authorities have threatened to force refugees out if not enough funds are received, arguing that the refugees have negatively impacted the country’s public services and economic growth, and have forced many Lebanese out of work.⁹⁵ Requests for funding to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees to their country have been made with no concern regarding conditions in Syria.⁹⁶

Syrian refugees have also been securitized by the Lebanese government through its framing of environmental issues. Instead of addressing the longstanding environmental concerns in the country, Lebanese government officials have evaded responsibility and blamed the Syrian refugee population for the country’s current environmental crisis. Lebanese Environment Minister Tarek Khatib described Syrian refugees in the country as a “ticking time bomb” and claimed they were responsible for river waste pollution.⁹⁷ Khatib claimed it was clear that the pollution of the prominent Al-Jaws River in northern Lebanon was coming from displaced Syrians who were throwing waste in the river, rather than disposing of waste in bins available to them.⁹⁸ In response to this issue Khatib proposed increasing security by providing municipal

⁹³ [Ibid.](#)

⁹⁴ Daou, “Lebanese leaders divided over fate of Syrian refugees,” France 24, October 16, 2017.

⁹⁵ Jad Chaaban, “Should Lebanon get more funds for hosting refugees?” Al Jazeera, April 4, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/lebanon-funds-hosting-refugees-170405082414586.html>.

⁹⁶ Middle East Monitor, “Lebanon’s President urges more efforts to repatriate Syrian refugees,” January 20, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190120-lebanons-president-urges-more-efforts-to-repatriate-syrian-refugees/>.

⁹⁷ Gasia Trtian, “Syrian refugees responsible for river waste pollution: Environment Minister,” The Daily Star, January 28, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jan-08/432886-syrian-refugees-responsible-for-river-waste-pollution-environment-minister.ashx>.

⁹⁸ [Ibid.](#)

police with more resources, to conduct surveillance and inspection tours throughout the camps.⁹⁹

The eviction of Syrian refugees and subsequent proposal for surveillance made by the Environment Minister support the securitizing narrative disseminated by the government that frames them as a burden to Lebanese society.

Securitizing speech acts by media

Thanks in large part to politicians' connections to media outlets, the Lebanese media has contributed to the securitization of Syrian refugees, and the spread of hate and xenophobia among the public towards them. Media coverage of refugee-related issues has been dominated by fear-mongering journalism that stereotypes and frames Syrian refugees negatively.

In 2015, a UNDP supported study was released on Lebanon's media coverage of Palestinian and Syrian refugees and migrants, which consisted of analysis of a large sample of surveyed media material. It found that Lebanon's print media focused primarily on security issues and the burden of asylum, rather than on human rights issues.¹⁰⁰ The same results were found for TV coverage, where more time was spent on framing refugees as security threats; criminals who are being accused and arrested for drug trafficking, assault, and rape.¹⁰¹

The presence of Syrian and Palestinian refugees has long been a factor of tension among Lebanese. This has been reflected in political and media discourse, resulting in racially charged and discriminatory fear-mongering against foreigners or "strangers," and hate-speech that draws on identity politics, cultural demographics, and national security issues.¹⁰² Lebanese media has

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Al Jazeera, "The fear and loathing of Syrian refugees in Lebanon," October 28, 2017, retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2017/10/fear-loathing-syrian-refugees-lebanon-171028121205744.html>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² George Sadaka, Jocelyne Nader and Tony Mikhael, "Monitoring Racism in the Lebanese Media: The Representation of the "Syrian" and the "Palestinian" in the News Coverage," UNDP, (2015): 25-30.

played a significant role in facilitating and producing racism by framing migrants as an issue to the state and Lebanese society.¹⁰³ The majority of the media created surrounding security has a negative tone, security issues are often connected to refugees, and stories on Syrian refugees frequently have the use of particular terms such as “fear,” “security,” “burden,” and “threatens.”¹⁰⁴

News anchors and TV personalities have presented stories with bias and hatred, often unjustifiably accusing Syrians of stealing Lebanese jobs, committing crimes against citizens, and glamourizing and justifying the beatings and crime directed at the refugees.¹⁰⁵ Narratives like this are presented nation-wide and accepted by citizens, who then spread stories and falsehoods about Syrian refugees, solidifying the securitization act and the sense of need for immediate political action. Racial bias and discrimination toward Syrian refugees have hit all levels of Lebanese media seen in its TV coverage, news print, and social media and online platforms. This process of securitization is further alienating Syrian refugees who live on the margins of society and who increasingly feel like their personal security is at risk. Syrians have increasingly been treated with hostility, illustrated by social media posts calling for violence against them and rallies promoting their expulsion.

5. The Policy of No Policy

The absence of policy regarding the Syrian refugee crisis is ultimately a reflection of the government’s general lack of capacity and political will to form comprehensive policy in

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁵ Sawssan Abou-Zahr, “Refugees and the Media in Lebanon,” Peace Insight, August 29, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.peaceinsight.org/blog/2017/08/refugees-and-media-lebanon/>.

response to the needs of its citizens. This absence of concrete policy has worsened conditions and exacerbated the humanitarian crisis unfolding within its borders.

International Law

The gap in refugee rights protection in Lebanon as well as a lack of clear policy on the refugee issue, is partly related to the fact that the country is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, and does not have a solid human rights framework in place. The 1951 convention's founding principle is that of non-refoulement, "which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom."¹⁰⁶ This is considered a rule of customary international law. Signatories to the convention are expected to cooperate with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure the rights of refugees are protected. While Lebanon has not signed the Convention, it is still bound by the customary principle of non-refoulement. This means it cannot return Syrian refugees or other migrants to their country of origin if they face death or ill-treatment. Notably, refoulement is not restricted to cases of direct expulsion, but also when "indirect pressure is so intense that it leads refugees to believe that they have no practical option but to return to a country where they face these risks."¹⁰⁷ Thus, repatriation needs to be voluntary and is only considered as such, if refugees are freely making the decision to return based on information available to them, about the situation in their home country.

The Lebanese government has been pushing the boundaries on this principle. Foreign Minister Bassil has recently stated that up to three quarters of Syrian refugees in Lebanon could

¹⁰⁶ UNHCR, "The 1951 Refugee Convention," retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Gaps in Lebanon's New Refugee Policy," March 14, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/14/gaps-lebanons-new-refugee-policy>.

be repatriated as they no longer face security or political threats, and simply remain in Lebanon for economic reasons.¹⁰⁸ Calls for repatriation have intensified and increased as Bashar al-Assad's government has re-gained control throughout Syria. Refugees in Lebanon still hold widespread concerns about the risk of ill-treatment, political persecution, and death that they may face if they return to Syria. In April 2019 at least 16 Syrians, some of which were registered refugees, were apprehended at the Beirut airport, forced to sign "voluntary repatriation" forms, and deported despite their fear of military conscription, arrest, and insecurity in Syria.¹⁰⁹ Regardless of whether or not Lebanon is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is an ideal structural framework at best, as it does not provide the international community with the tools required to establish and enforce its principles of refugee rights protection.

Lebanon's failure to adopt the international refugee regime is also seen by the discrepancy in its labelling of refugees compared to the United Nations (UN), highlighted by the 2017 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The LCRP was developed by the Lebanese government and the UN to help address the need for humanitarian assistance for refugees in the country. As outlined in the LCRP's preamble, the UN labels the current migration of civilians from Syria as a *refugee movement*, and considers these Syrians *refugees*, as they meet the definition in terms of requiring international protection.¹¹⁰ In contrast, the Lebanese government refers to the Syrian civilians who have fled Syria since 2011, as "temporarily displaced

¹⁰⁸ Patrick Wintour, "Thousands of Syrian refugees could be sent back, says Lebanese minister," The Guardian, June 15, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/15/thousands-of-syrian-refugees-could-be-sent-back-says-lebanese-minister>.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Syrians Summarily Deported from Airport," May 24, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/24/lebanon-syrians-summarily-deported-airport>.

¹¹⁰ Government of Lebanon UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020," (2019): Preamble.

individuals.”¹¹¹ This demonstrates the Lebanese government’s interpretation and active choice to avoid referring to Syrians entering Lebanon as “refugees,” preferring to label them in terms of being temporarily displaced, or as economic migrants, effectively downgrading their internationally recognized refugee status, and therefore the precarity of their situation. The LCRP notably states that the Lebanese government “reserves its sovereign right to determine their status according to Lebanese laws and regulations.”¹¹² The same language is used by the Lebanese government to refer to Syrian civilians in its EU partnership documents, where they are referred to as “displaced” Syrians rather than the UN’s description of Syrian civilians as “refugees.”¹¹³ This illustration of the Lebanese government’s refusal to accept Syrian civilians as “refugees” in political discourse and formal international documentation reinforces the country’s rejection of the international refugee regime and feeds into its securitization of the refugees within its borders.

National Law and Policy

Lebanon lacks a national rights-based legal framework to appropriately address refugee movements and crises. No national legislation currently exists to guide the management of refugees. Governments that face an influx of migrants while lacking policy options, are likely to cast refugee populations as security threats “to justify actions that would not otherwise be permissible, such as denying refugees freedom of movement, preventing new arrivals of refugees and, in exceptional circumstances, carrying out mass expulsions.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Government of Lebanon, EU, and UN, “Supporting the future of Syria and the region,” Lebanon partnership paper, Brussels II Conference 24-25 April 2018, retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34145/lebanon-partnership-paper.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Loescher and Milner, “Security implications of protracted refugee situations,” 34.

Previously, a Memoranda of Understanding between the Government of Lebanon and UNHCR facilitated a method of refugee management in the country. In the absence of national refugee law, a 2003 MoU defined the Lebanese government's role regarding asylum seekers, and allowed for the provision of temporary residence permits to refugees.¹¹⁵ Notably, this MoU failed to refer to the 1951 convention's principle of non-refoulement. Additionally, this MoU does not apply to Syrian refugees in the current context.¹¹⁶

Mourad highlights two "critical inactions" by the Lebanese government that influenced the current refugee situation in Lebanon. First is the Government of Lebanon's de facto open border policy, which continued until late 2014. Mourad argues that the government's inaction on border control was not an explicit open border policy, but simply just an absence of policy altogether.¹¹⁷ This had serious implications for municipalities who were forced to individually address the influx of refugees in their jurisdictions, which has created significant variance in the way refugees are handled in different locations throughout the country. The second critical inaction of the Lebanese government highlighted by Mourad is non-encampment. This refers to the refusal of the government to adopt a policy allowing the formal building of shelters or refugee camps for Syrian civilians, and is directly related to the country's experience with Palestinian refugees. Lebanon's policy of non-encampment has also resulted in ad hoc measures by municipalities in response to the influx of refugees. In 2014, Human Rights Watch found that at least 45 municipalities had curfews in place for Syrian refugees.¹¹⁸ Through her fieldwork,

¹¹⁵ UNHCR, "Country Operations Plan: Lebanon," retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/3fd9c6a14.pdf>, (2004).

¹¹⁶ ALEF, "Two Years On: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," retrieved from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/40854>, (2013): 12.

¹¹⁷ Lama Mourad, "Inaction as Policy-Making: Understanding Lebanon's Early Response to the Refugee Influx," *Refugees and Migration Movements in the Middle East*, March (2017): 51.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: At least 45 local curfews imposed on Syrian refugees," December 3, 2014, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/03/lebanon-least-45-local-curfews-imposed-syrian-refugees>.

Mourad has identified 142 municipalities with curfews for Syrians.¹¹⁹ The curfews are usually enforced by municipal police, sometimes supported by vigilante groups who attack and intimidate Syrians who are out past the curfew. These community-level directives are a result of the government's inaction and failure to implement national-level policy to address the refugee crisis.

The Lebanese government's perpetual inaction toward the Syrian refugee crisis changed in October 2014, when the Lebanese Cabinet passed a motion to cease the acceptance of Syrian refugees into Lebanon, and to reduce the number of refugees already present in the country.¹²⁰ The residency restrictions related to this policy have had a severe impact on the rights and wellbeing of Syrian refugees. In 2018, roughly 73% of refugees did not have legal residency and 69% were living below the poverty line.¹²¹ Without legal status and residency the mobility of Syrian refugees is restricted due to fear of arrest, preventing them from finding work to support themselves. Lack of legal residency also affects their access to healthcare and education, and facilitates child labour. Out of 660,000 school-aged Syrian children, 54% are not enrolled in school.¹²² The government has vowed to undertake a review of this policy but has yet to do so since its implementation in 2015.

There has been a consistent political divide over the conditions required for Syrian refugees to be repatriated.¹²³ Shiite militant group Hezbollah has been in favour of "safe return"

¹¹⁹ Mourad, "Inaction as Policy-Making," 53.

¹²⁰ Hassan Lakkis, "Lebanon Cabinet votes to stop accepting Syrian refugees," The Daily Star, October 23, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Oct-23/275075-refugee-crisis-tops-lebanon-cabinet-agenda.ashx>.

¹²¹ UNHCR et al., "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," 2;4.

¹²² The Washington Post, "In Lebanon, Syrian refugees face new pressure to go home," June 20, 2019, retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-lebanon-syrian-refugees-face-new-pressure-to-go-home/2019/06/20/066c2eb8-9328-11e9-956a-88c291ab5c38_story.html?utm_term=.32b13ec06cff.

¹²³ Daou, "Lebanese leaders divided over fate of Syrian refugees," retrieved from <https://www.france24.com/en/20171016-lebanon-aoun-hariri-hezbollah-return-syrian-refugees>.

which would involve coordination with Assad's regime, while PM Hariri and his faction oppose this.¹²⁴ Hariri has claimed he will not act on repatriating refugees without permission from the UN. Adding to this confusion is the unilateral decision of Lebanon's main security authority, the General Security, to arrest Syrian refugees arbitrarily.¹²⁵ This confusion and lack of consensus on the subject of returning refugees to Syria has provided an additional political barrier to any effective or comprehensive development of policy that would address the status and needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

It is clear that the country's current approach to the refugee crisis is completely unsustainable for refugees, Lebanese civilians, and the state. The Government of Lebanon continues to employ a short-term strategy for the refugee crisis, with the disbursement of humanitarian aid provided by the international community. Such an approach will not adequately deal with the longstanding development and governance issues the country must address in order to improve the conditions for all parties involved. The failure of the Lebanese government to implement a long-term strategy for dealing with the influx in the vulnerable population has facilitated the rise of public frustration and hostility, and has ultimately contributed to the public's acceptance of political and media rhetoric that has securitized Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Stop Detaining Syrian Refugees," May 20, 2011, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/20/lebanon-stop-detaining-syrian-refugees>; and The Syrian Observer, "Syrian Refugees Arrested in Beirut Airport," March 8, 2019, retrieved from <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/49022/syrian-refugees-arrested-in-beirut-airport.html>.

6. Implications of securitization

The securitization of refugees has serious implications for migrants and asylum seekers. Securitizing speech and policy directed at refugees delegitimizes their status as refugees, facilitates the violation of their rights, and prevents them from accessing much needed services and assistance. The securitization of migration prevents the integration of refugees into the host society, and increases tensions between refugees and the local population. These factors ultimately block the establishment of solidarity and understanding between the two groups, which is needed to overcome stereotypes, prevent violence and hostility, and facilitate development of relationships and discourse that will lead to real policy solutions.

As seen with the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, securitization of refugees can result in the severe marginalization and scapegoating of a migrant population within the host country. Lebanese context and history combined with frustration stemming from governance and development issues, has made the Lebanese public responsive to securitizing acts conducted by the main securitizing actors in Lebanon: the government and media. The acceptance of a securitizing act by the audience determines the success of the securitization process. This acceptance empowers the securitizing actor to use extreme measures to address the issue framed as a threat, whether it is real or not.¹²⁶ This process has been unfolding in Lebanon since the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011. Lebanese politicians have capitalized on the frustration and fear of the Lebanese public, and used the Syria refugee crisis as a way to further their own political agendas. The economic deterioration, lack of employment, poor infrastructure, and poor quality and provision of services the country faces, were conditions already in place prior to the

¹²⁶ Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, and Jan Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ revisited: Theory and cases,” *International Relations* 30, no. 4 (2016): 518.

arrival of Syrian refugees. Through securitizing discourse, the government as well as the media, has framed the refugees as the main source and aggravator of these societal conditions, effectively justifying the implementation of severe restrictions on this population. The following subsections will outline the various implications of this securitization.

Implications for Syrian refugees

Government and media discourse framing Syrian refugees as a threat to Lebanese security and identity has had a negative effect on the status, treatment, and rights of Syrian refugees. By framing Syrian refugees as a social and national security threat, the government has garnered public support for its restrictive policies for the refugees. The securitization discourse produced by Lebanese government and media is not restricted to words alone, “it is a community practice that is spread and active and is manifested concretely when it comes to refugees and the displaced, through inequality.”¹²⁷

As illustrated in previous sections of this paper, the effect of securitization on Syrian refugees in Lebanon is immense. Human Rights Watch found that residency regulations implemented in January 2015, which include a \$200 annual renewal fee, have resulted in most Syrians losing their legal status.¹²⁸ This has had a number of consequences for the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. Many have restricted their movement for fear of arrest, and this immobility has resulted in an increase in child labour, as children are less likely to be stopped

¹²⁷ Sadaka et al., “Monitoring Racism in the Lebanese Media,” 40.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Lebanon: Residency Rules Put Syrians at Risk,” January 12, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/12/lebanon-residency-rules-put-syrians-risk>.

and interrogated by authorities.¹²⁹ In addition to residency restrictions, professional job opportunities have been restricted, and municipal governments have imposed curfews.¹³⁰

Discourse by Lebanese political leaders that frames refugees as a threat and supports their removal from the state, combined with a lack of comprehensive nation-wide policy to effectively address the crisis, has created an environment rampant with confusion and ad hoc policy. The increasingly hostile discourse combined with frustration experienced by local leaders, has culminated in several municipalities banning Syrians altogether. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 3,664 Syrian nationals have been forcibly evicted from at least 13 municipalities from 2016 to 2018.¹³¹ The Lebanese army evicted another 7,524 near an airbase in the Bekaa Valley in 2017, and 15, 126 more refugees have pending eviction orders as of April 2018.¹³² The consistent but ad hoc forced eviction of refugees from one location to nearby locations raises questions about whether their forced move is really about security. This reflects the general desire of authorities to ensure Syrian refugees don't get too comfortable, in order to avoid a situation similar to the case of Palestinian refugee camps. Constant eviction prevents the refugees from settling in one location, thereby preventing the establishment of schooling, or health and community centres in these informal settlements.

According to Human Rights Watch, Syrian refugees are experiencing increased hostility and pressure to leave Lebanon, with pressure coming primarily from politicians, municipal police, and hate groups.¹³³ Many are also experiencing increased public harassment by

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Middle East Eye, "Lebanon imposes visas on war-fleeing Syrians," February 13, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanon-imposes-visas-war-fleeing-syrians-72453107>.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch, "Our Homes Are Not for Strangers," April 20, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/04/20/our-homes-are-not-strangers/mass-evictions-syrian-refugees-lebanese-municipalities>.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

Lebanese neighbours and community members, with public resentment fueled by the discourse of politicians and media. Refugees have reported harassment, arrest, and violence inflicted upon them by Lebanese civilians. In July 2017, a video calling for violence against Syrians spread across social media and culminated in at least one documented case of physical assault against a refugee.¹³⁴ 400 Syrians were displaced after an arson attack on their settlement in June 2019.¹³⁵ These are just a few of the many cases of violent interactions between Lebanese civilians and Syrian refugees.

Lebanon's inconsistent application and lack of enforcement of its policy on Syrian refugees may be a result of the country's poor capacity, however it may also largely be a reflection of the sincerity of the state's framing of Syrian refugees as a security threat. Securitizing speech acts in the form of highly racialized, xenophobic, and alarmist language directed at Syrian refugees has been an effective way for the state's political elite to deflect public outrage from their own inability to deal with systemic issues that were present before the refugee crisis. The xenophobic rhetoric of politicians like Gebran Bassil has aggravated the political climate in the country, leading to discrimination and violence against Syrians in Lebanon. It is evident that the securitization of the refugee issue in Lebanon has had a significant impact on Syrian refugees and their experience within the country. The continued violation of their rights and hostile treatment by Lebanese government, media, and civilians as a result of this securitization, will further aggravate the sociopolitical climate and sense of insecurity within the country. Such a combination of factors poses the risk of erupting into a legitimate security threat,

¹³⁴ Lamia Estatie, "Lebanon detains men behind assault on Syrian refugee," BBC News, July 19, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-40653714>.

¹³⁵ Bethan McKernan, "Syrian refugees forced to destroy their own homes in Lebanon," The Guardian, June 30, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/30/syrian-refugees-forced-destroy-own-homes-lebanon>.

which the government would be ill-equipped to deal with, making these acts of securitization counter-intuitive.

Implications for Lebanon and its citizens

The protracted presence of refugees can provoke pre-existing tensions and shift the balance of power between racial, ethnic, or religious groups within the host country.¹³⁶ While this is a legitimate fear and risk in the case of Lebanon due to the different religions and its confessional political system, it has been used to securitize the refugee issue as a social security threat. Politicians have used this argument to direct local and national grievances at the Syrian refugees. This securitization has heightened tensions between Syrians and Lebanese within the country. By inciting hatred through its discourse, the Lebanese government and media run the risk of aggravating an already volatile situation, by pushing both populations to violence and extremism. Acceptance by the Lebanese public of such polarizing political discourse is a reflection of the complex collective memory and history of war and interactions with the Syrian state, as well as the current social, economic, and political state of affairs that push many Lebanese citizens to the brink of survival in their day to day life.

The refugee crisis has effectively divided the Lebanese population. Securitization of the refugee issue in Lebanon has created a divisive environment, separating those that are “honorable patriots” (anti-refugee) and those that are simply “traitors” (supportive of refugees).¹³⁷ This political discourse has increased the sense of insecurity among refugees and

¹³⁶ Loescher and Milner, “Security implications of protracted refugee situations,” 32.

¹³⁷ Halim Shebaya, “Lebanon has a racism problem,” Al Jazeera, October 21, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/lebanon-racism-problem-171019075823036.html>; and The Legal Agenda, “The memorandum is in solidarity with the Socialist Forum: so that Lebanon’s sovereignty does not conflict with the values of freedom and humanity.” August 17, 2017, retrieved from <http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=3789>.

Lebanese communities, and limits the willingness and freedom of Lebanese citizens to defend the rights of Syrian refugees.¹³⁸ The hostility between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese public is founded on a lack of mutual understanding and is hardened by the circulation of negative stereotypes¹³⁹ and discourse coming from government and media. This tension between the groups is also related to the vulnerabilities experienced by the Lebanese population prior to the influx of Syrians.¹⁴⁰ Refugees are often considered a privileged group by local populations, especially if they are also in need but not receiving the same services.¹⁴¹ Many Lebanese have argued that despite the billions of dollars in international aid to assist the country with the refugee crisis, Lebanese schools, infrastructure, and public services are being overwhelmed, rent has increased, and cheap Syrian labour has flooded the job market.¹⁴² The general frustration of the public on these issues directed at the refugees rather than the government, demonstrates that the Lebanese government has effectively scapegoated Syrian refugees, for issues it lacks the political will, capacity, or desire to address.

It is evident that the Government of Lebanon's current response to the crisis effectively securitizes Syrian refugees and violates their human rights. Rather than address the various socioeconomic and political grievances that lie at the root of Lebanese frustration, the government's strategy to date has effectively fostered a polarized climate of insecurity and fear. This highly volatile environment has the potential to foster civil unrest and even war, as well as radicalization and homegrown terrorism among marginalized groups. Lebanese politicians have

¹³⁸ Saferworld, "Building Peace into Refugee Responses," 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Loescher and Milner, "Security implications of protracted refugee situations," 32.

¹⁴² The Washington Post, "In Lebanon, Syrian refugees face new pressure to go home," June 20, 2019, retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-lebanon-syrian-refugees-face-new-pressure-to-go-home/2019/06/20/066c2eb8-9328-11e9-956a-88c291ab5c38_story.html?utm_term=.32b13ec06cff.

capitalized on the responsiveness of the Lebanese public to their securitizing discourse on the refugee issue. While much of the Lebanese public feels strongly toward the Syrian refugees as a major source for issues facing the country, the real concern and root of the problem is the state's capacity, which was very poor prior to the influx of refugees. Ultimately, this will have serious implications for Lebanese nationals and the sustainability of state infrastructure and institutions in the future, if the government does not actually implement a long-term strategy to deal with the various sociopolitical and economic concerns that go beyond the issue of the Syrian refugees. In this way, securitization of refugees in Lebanon has not only harmed the refugees themselves, but Lebanese citizens as well.

Regional and International Implications

The securitization of migration in Lebanon also has implications for the international community. With the acceptance of securitizing speech and policies by the Lebanese public, the Government will continue to pursue and push for the full repatriation of Syrian refugees, or the expulsion of these refugees from its borders to other countries. This is a potentially dangerous policy in terms of regional stability and security, and has human rights implications.

Many Syrian refugees continue to stay in Lebanon despite poor living conditions because they fear what awaits them in Syria. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, nearly 2,000 refugees have been arrested in Syria upon their arrival.¹⁴³ These returnees face forced conscription, torture and disappearance when they are detained. In addition to this, Syrian refugees who have returned to their country face discrimination and mistrust from fellow

¹⁴³ Janice Dickson, "Fearing retribution at home, Syrian refugees in Lebanon see no way back and no way forward," The Globe and Mail, June 13, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-fearing-retribution-at-home-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-see-no-way/>.

Syrians, for their choice to flee the country.¹⁴⁴ Hezbollah has orchestrated “reconciliation deals” with the Syrian regime to return refugees from Arsal, Lebanon, without much attention or pressure to do otherwise from the international community.¹⁴⁵ Such deals with the regime put Syrian refugees at risk and normalize relations with Assad’s regime.

The protracted refugee crisis and the policy or lack thereof of the Lebanese government will continue to require the support of the international community and have an impact on the international refugee regime. The reluctance of Western states to accept and integrate refugee and migrant populations into their borders will facilitate the continued acceptance of policies that “reward host states of first asylum for serving as buffer zones against asylum seekers.”¹⁴⁶ The global refugee management system is comprised of domestic laws, treaties, and international customary law. Cuellar argues that this system is best understood as the result of a “grand compromise” that allows countries in the Global North to convey humanitarian hopes for vulnerable populations, while at the same time, limiting the inconvenience to themselves by deflecting the burden of hosting migrant populations to the Global South.¹⁴⁷ These donor states are primarily European or Western states, and their goal is to maintain the status quo. It is not in their interests to accept asylum seekers, so they control access to asylum by closing their borders while financially supporting countries like Lebanon, to host migrants within their borders. This established system of refugee management prioritizes the sovereignty of states in the Global North at the expense of the sovereignty of states in the Global South, which are

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Hassan Abdullah, “Refugees return to Syria from Lebanon in Hezbollah-mediated deal,” Reuters, July 12, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-lebanon/refugees-return-to-syria-from-lebanon-in-hezbollah-mediated-deal-idUSKBN19X1Y6>.

¹⁴⁶ Gerasimos Tsourapas, “Syrian refugees have become pawns in their host nations’ politics,” The Washington Post, June 17, 2019, retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/17/syrian-refugees-have-become-pawns-their-host-nations-politics/?utm_term=.260cae07de91.

¹⁴⁷ Mariano-Florentino Cuellar, “Refugee Security and the Organizational Logic of Legal Mandates,” *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 37, (2006): 622.

faced with significant long-term challenges even though they often accept the role of host as a temporary measure.¹⁴⁸

Lebanon has accepted millions in international assistance to help with the refugee crisis within its borders, while at the same time pushing the need for the return of Syrian refugees to Syria, through both discourse and action. In 2017, the international community committed \$6 billion to go towards addressing the refugee crisis in Lebanon.¹⁴⁹ In 2018, only 38% of the US \$2.3 billion in funding for Syrian refugees in Lebanon was allocated, leaving a \$1.4 billion gap that was filled through urgent appeals by the UNHCR.¹⁵⁰ Lebanon obtained a 400 million-euro “partnership” with the EU in 2016, intended to improve the living conditions of both Syrian refugees and Lebanese nationals.¹⁵¹ The trend of establishing migration compacts has promoted the commodification of refugees, with negative implications for the refugees as well as members of the host community. Overburdened host states are encouraged to “treat refugee population as a source of economic rent.”¹⁵² These traits are demonstrated in the Lebanese context by the government’s consistent request for more aid, and its use of threats (to force out refugees) if aid is not received. Lebanon’s receipt of aid seemingly has not improved the situation for Syrian refugees or Lebanese citizens.

¹⁴⁸ Rawan Arar, “The New Grand Compromise” How Syrian Refugees Changed the Stakes in the Global Refugee Assistance Regime,” *Middle East Law and Governance* 9, (2017): 300.

¹⁴⁹ Barrett Limoges, “Thousands of Syrians face eviction from Lebanon camps,” Al Jazeera, April 15, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/thousands-syrians-face-eviction-lebanon-camps-170415042553730.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Eldawy, “A Fragile Situation,” retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugee-swell-push-lebanon-over-edge>.

¹⁵¹ European Commission, “EU-Lebanon Partnership, The Compact,” August 2017, retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/lebanon-compact.pdf>.

¹⁵² Gerasimos Tsourapas, “How Migration Deals Lead to Refugee Commodification,” News Deeply, February 13, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2019/02/13/how-migration-deals-lead-to-refugee-commodification>.

The securitization of migration and Syrian refugees in Lebanon is also feeding into the increase in nationalism and fascist rhetoric regarding the global migration and refugee crisis we are seeing today. Anti-refugee sentiment in Lebanon has expanded thanks to a continuously deteriorating economy and the nationalist rhetoric of particular political actors including Gebran Bassil, who has referred to the Lebanese “genetic distinction” in his political slogans encouraging the removal of Syrian refugees from Lebanon.¹⁵³ The same type of xenophobic securitizing discourse in Europe is directed at Muslims and migrants from the Middle East and Africa. As Huysmans outlines, the political process of linking migration to security issues is related to the “wider politicization” that portrays migrants as a threat to the protection of national identity and the provision of social services.¹⁵⁴ In order to set and pursue their political agendas, securitizing actors securitize an issue and then capitalize on the fears of the general public to justify their use of extreme policy measures. The current securitization occurring in Lebanon mirrors what has been happening in Europe since the 1980s, as well as its own history of securitization with Palestinian refugees. Ultimately, the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has contributed to the international discourse on global migration that largely frames the issue of migration in terms of national security over human security. Such narrative overlooks the humanitarian aspect of this subject and does not address the need for comprehensive policy to effectively deal with global mass migration, which will continue to be a major national, regional, and global issue, particularly with the anticipated increase in environmental migrants due to climate change. Lebanon will continue to put pressure on its international partners to cooperate and provide support for the ongoing refugee crisis, and the

¹⁵³ McKernan, “Syrian refugees forced to destroy their own homes in Lebanon,” retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/30/syrian-refugees-forced-destroy-own-homes-lebanon>.

¹⁵⁴ Jeff Huysmans, “The European Union and the Securitization of Migration.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5 (2000): 751.

international community will likely respond to these demands, whether for the sake of protecting the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers, or to deflect from their own reluctance to accept refugees within their borders.

7. Conclusion

Using the theory of securitization as a framework for analysis, this paper examined the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This paper uses a framework that has been mostly used to study the securitization of migration in liberal-democratic Western states, and applies it to the case of a developing country facing geopolitical conflict and domestic instability. Lebanon is an interesting case to study as it is distinguished by cultural and historical similarities with the refugee population, a sectarian political system, and a longstanding history of accepting refugees, as well as being the source of refugee migration.

The efforts to securitize Syrian refugees in Lebanon are quite blatant, as seen by the discourse produced by government officials and media. The receptiveness of the Lebanese audience to these narratives is rooted in the deep collective history of the country's experience with Palestinian refugees and Syrian military and political intervention. While the Syrian refugee crisis has clearly exacerbated Lebanon's pre-existing governance and development issues, public services, infrastructure and general sociopolitical state of affairs, there is no substantial evidence that the Syrian refugees have been the cause of these conditions in the country, to the extent that the highly critical political discourse has framed them as such. Additionally, the refugees as a legitimate security threat to the sovereignty and demographic identity of the country remains to be seen. Lebanese political authorities have framed Syrian refugees as a threat to national identity and security, largely for their own political purposes. This may lead to more insecurity,

as the increasingly marginalized Syrian population becomes more susceptible to radicalization and the hostility between Syrians and Lebanese grows.

By utilizing securitization theory with sociological considerations, this paper has clearly demonstrated the role and significance of sociocultural and historical context, as well as the dynamic between actors, in determining the responsiveness of an audience to securitizing speech acts and policy, and therefore the success of the securitization process. It has also illustrated that securitization in this case is primarily conducted by political elite with their greater political objectives in mind, rather than legitimate concerns over social and national security. Syrian refugees have proven to be a satisfactory scapegoat for the Lebanese government, as politicians have successfully deflected their responsibility and the discontent of the Lebanese public onto this vulnerable population. The presence and challenge of Syrian refugees on the country's infrastructure and public services has fueled and justified the demand for increased international support and funding by the Lebanese government. The Lebanese government's approach to the migration issue highlights the relationship between the securitization of vulnerable populations and the strategy, policy, and overall method of governing by particular states in the context of the current international migration crisis. Political interests will ultimately trump humanitarian or human security concerns when it comes to migration policy.

In these ways the securitization framework provides an understanding of Lebanon's greater political objectives, and how it has chosen to deal with the Syrian refugees within the greater context of the global migration crisis. Ultimately the framing of Syrian refugees as a security threat has created more animosity and tension between Lebanese nationals and Syrians, fueled by the complex history of these two groups and the everlasting Lebanese fear of Syrian encroachment. The policies implemented as a result of securitization have created an

environment in which there is a continuous decrease in the sense of safety of both Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens. Without a comprehensive policy in place that seeks to treat the presence of Syrian refugees as a legitimate humanitarian issue, the securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon will continue, to the detriment of all parties involved.

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