THE DISCOURSES OF POLITICAL LEADERS TOWARDS SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DOMESTIC POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

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A tragic result of the prolonged conflict in Syria has been the refugee crisis that affected the international community in general, and the countries sharing borders with Syria in particular. Lebanon, a neighboring state to Syria, with a small territory and complex political system, has hosted the highest number of Syrian refugees per capita. Maintaining a fragile economic, social and political structure, Lebanon is greatly impacted by the arrival of a substantial number of refugees. Consequently, the refugee crisis has become one of the key topics in Lebanese political agenda. After the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, the former Lebanese Prime Minister in 2005, the Lebanese political landscape came to be dominated by two blocs respectively known as the "March 8 Alliance" and the "March 14 Alliance". The two blocs were defined with respect to the support (March 8) or opposition (March 14) they expressed towards the Syrian regime's presence in Lebanon, which maintained a military presence in the country for almost three decades. This thesis argues that, despite the cracks in and transitivity among these blocs, this polarized structure was revived with the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon. In this context the discourse of four leading political

figures from both blocs are analyzed, in an attempt to trace the differences between the two blocs with respect to Syrian refugees.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, Lebanon, refugee governance, discourse analysis, 8 & 14 March blocs.

ÖZ

LÜBNAN'DAKİ SİYASİ LİDERLERİN SURİYELİ MÜLTECİLERE YÖNELİK SÖYLEMLERİ VE İÇ SİYASETE YANSIMALARI

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Suriye'de uzun süredir devam etmekte olan ihtilafın trajik sonuçlarından bir tanesi de başta komşu ülkeler olmak üzere uluslararası toplumu bir bütün olarak etkileyen mülteci krizidir. Yüzölçümü bakımından oldukça ufak ve karmaşık bir siyasi sisteme sahip olan Lübnan, Suriye'ye komşu olmasıyla kişi başına düşen en fazla Suriyeli mülteciye ev sahipliği yapan ülke konumundadır. Lübnan, kırılgan ekonomik, sosyal ve politik yapısıyla çok sayıda mültecinin gelişinden olumsuz anlamda büyük ölçüde etkilenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, mülteci krizi Lübnan siyasi gündeminin önemli konularından biri haline gelmiştir. 2005 yılında, eski Lübnan Başbakanı Refik Hariri'nin suikast sonucunda öldürülmesinden sonra Lübnan siyasi ortamına "8 Mart İttifakı" ve "14 Mart İttifakı" olarak bilinen iki blok egemen olmuştur ve Lübnan siyasetinin geleceğini şekillendirmede önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bu iki blok, esas olarak Lübnan'da yaklaşık otuz yıldır askeri varlığını sürdüren Suriye rejiminin destekçileri (8 Mart) ve muhalifleri (14 Mart) olarak bölünmüştür. Bu tez, bahsekonu bloklar arasında zamanla geçişler ve dağılmalar olmasına rağmen, Lübnan'da var olan bu kutuplaşmanın Suriye mülteci akını ile tekrar görünür hale geldiğini iddia etmektedir. Bu tezde, Suriyeli mültecilerle ilgili olarak iki blok arasındaki farklılıkları

göstermek ve açıklamak amacıyla önde gelen dört siyasi liderin söylemleri analiz edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli mülteciler, Lübnan, mülteci yönetimi, söylem analizi, 8 ve 14 Mart blokları

To my mom

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FM Future Movement

FPM Free Patriotic Movement

GDGS General Directorate of General Security

GoL Government of Lebanon

GSO General Security Office

IOM International Organization for Migration

IDPs Internally Displaced Persons

ITS Informal Tented Settlements

LAF Lebanese Armed Forces

LNM Lebanese National Movement

LCRP Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2015-2016)

MoU Memorandum of understanding

PRL Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

PRS Palestinian Refugees from Syria

PSP Progressive Socialist Party

RRP Regional Response Plan (2012)

RRP5 Regional Response Plan 2013

RRP6 Syria Regional Response Plan 2014

3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015- 2016

RSD Refugee Status Determination

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Program

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNIFIL United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East

UNSC United Nations Security Council

UNSCOL United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon

VASyR Vulnerabilities Assessment of Syria Refugees in Lebanon

WB World Bank

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The refugee crisis became one of the most crucial issues in the 21st century, as the world faces the highest level of forced displacement to date.[1] Civil wars, conflicts, violence, and natural disasters affect the world every year. Millions have been forced to flee their homes to escape the wars, disasters, and persecution for a safer and secure future,[2] making it necessary for host countries to host and handle large numbers of refugees. Figure 1 illustrates the recent crisis that reached its zenith in terms of the number of refugees during the Syrian civil war in 2011. The prolonged conflict in Syria forced civilians to flee their homes, seeking refuge either inside the country or beyond its borders.[3]

Thus, the Syrian refugee crisis became one of the largest crises' affecting the international community. The United Nations (UN) named it as the biggest humanitarian crisis since the 1994 Rwandan genocide.[4] Syrian refugees have found their way to different parts of the world, while the estimates of the total number of displaced Syrians exceeded 13 million, with 6.7 million internally displaced, and 6.6 million externally displaced people. 5.6 million out of the latter figure are hosted in neighboring countries.[5]

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[1] "Figures at a Glance: Statistical Yearbook" UNHCR, accessed December, 2, 2019, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html

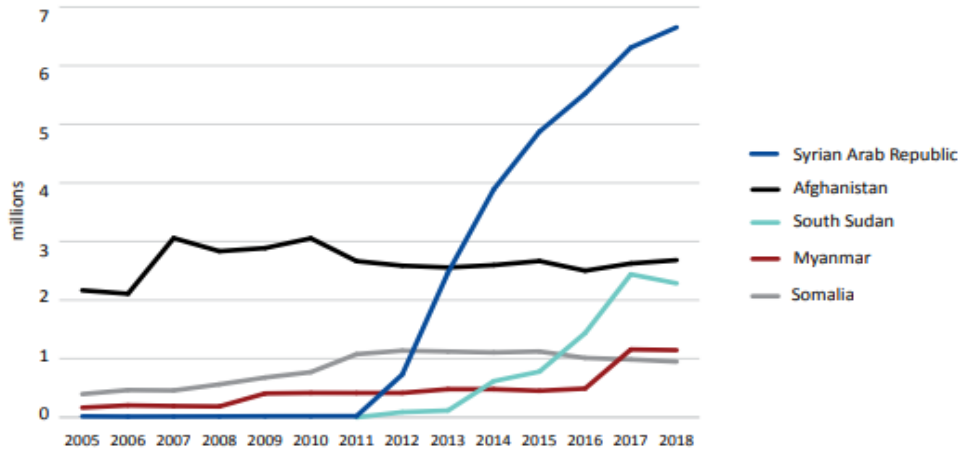
[2] Sarah Kenyon Lischer. "The Global Refugee Crisis: Regional Destabilization & Humanitarian Protection." *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (2017).

[3] "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018" UNHCR, accessed, November, 24, 2019, https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf.

[4] Yavuz Güçtürk, *The Loss of Humanity the Human Rights Dimension of the Civil War in Syria* (İstanbul: Turkuaz Matbaacılık, 2014).

[5] "Syria Emergency" UNHCR, accessed December, 2, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html.

Undeniably, the Middle East has been a scene for highest number of refugees through the history.[6] The region is already familiar with refugee influxes such as the cases of Palestinian refugees since Al Nakba in 1948 as well as Iraqi refugees after the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 Iraq War. The highest numbers recorded since the Second World War, however, came with the 2011 Syrian civil war. The neighboring countries which have borne the heaviest burden of the crisis are Turkey hosting 3.7 million refugees,[7] Lebanon hosting 1.5 million,[8] and Jordan hosting 1.3 million.[9] It should be noted that these countries are hosting unregistered refugees as well.



Source: UNHCR, n.d.a. (accessed on 9 July 2019).
Note: South Sudan became a country in 2011.

Figure 1. 1 Number of refugees by top 5 countries of origin as 2018 (millions)[10]

[6] "European Civil Protection And Humanitarian Aid Operations: Syria" EUROPA, accessed December, 12, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/syria_en.

[7] "Syria Regional Refugee Response" UNHCR, accessed December 1, 2021 https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria.

[8] "Lebanon Events of 2018" Human Rights Watch, accessed December, 1, 2021 https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/lebanon.

[9] "Jordan: Syrian Refugees" ACAPS, accessed December, 2, 2021 https://www.acaps.org/country/jordan/crisis/syrian-refugees.

The decade-long Syrian crisis made the situation in the region worse in terms of humanitarian, economic and security consequences.[10] On the 10th anniversary of the Syrian War, the Arab League Chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit described the effects of the crisis as 'tragic', particularly because of its humanitarian consequences.[11] The areas neighboring the country had to shoulder the heaviest burden by accepting most of the Syrian refugees.[12]

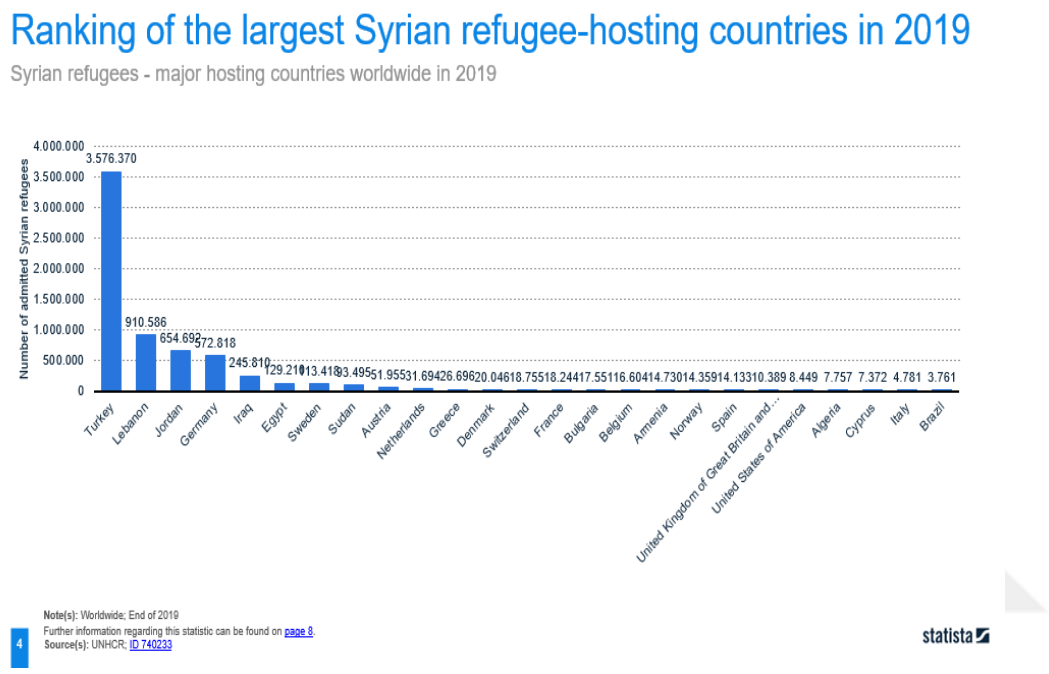


Figure 1. 2 Ranking of the largest Syrian refugee-hosting countries in 2019[13]

[10] "Arab League chief says decade-long Syrian situation tragic" *Xinhua*, accesed March 16, 2021 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/16/c_139812761.htm.

[11] "Statements by the Secretary-General of the Arab League on the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the Syrian crisis" League of Arab States, accesed March 15, 2021, http://www.lasportal.org/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2808.

[12] IOM, "Report 2020".

[13]"Ranking of the largest Syrian refugee-hosting countries in 2019" Statistica, accessed, July 20, 2021 https://www.statista.com/statistics/740233/major-syrian-refugee-hosting-countries-worldwide/

Aboul Gheit underlined that the humanitarian consequences of the refugee crisis are not restricted to Syria but constitute a tremendous burden on the neighboring countries. Lebanon in this context stands out as a country that is severely strained by the economic and political consequences of the crisis.[14] Lebanon is currently hosting the largest number of the Syrian refugees per capita.[15] Credible estimates put the figure at 156 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants.[16] It is also noteworthy that the country had its share of experience with different refugee waves through its history.[17] Quite naturally, the refugee crisis became a vital topic in Lebanon's political agenda.[18] Given its fragile economic, social and political structure, Lebanon was affected relatively more by the arrival of large numbers of refugees. The comparison of the numbers of refugees accepted by other countries, in comparison to the size of the host community reveals the scale of the burden Lebanon has taken. Without exception, the prolonged and the very large number of refugee waves create additional economic, social, political, and environmental challenges for the host countries. This also applies for Lebanon, the infrastructure of which was already fragile even before the Syrian refugee crisis.[19] The list of major problems the country had been suffering includes the lack waste and sanitation facilities, water supply scarcity, insufficiency in providing public goods, and falling wages due to by high levels of unemployment and competition for jobs.[20] The

[14] League of Arab States, "Statements.".

[15] "Largest Refugee and Asylum Seeker Populations by Country of Destination, 1960-2020" MPI, Accessed 22 November, 2021, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/largest-refugee-populations-country-destination

[16] IOM, "Report 2020," 85.

[17] George Sadek, *Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. (* Washington DC: Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center, 2013).

[18] Maya Yahya, *Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Middle East Centre, 2018).

[19] "Lebanese Communities in Focus: Supporting Communities Protecting," UNHCR, last modified January 6, 2015, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/42804.

[20] UNCHR, "Lebanese Communities in Focus.".

tremendous burden posed by the Syrian conflict and refugee flow was thus a second blow on top of all these. Due to its fragile economic state, inadequate infrastructure and governance capabilities, Lebanon soon became the most affected country. According to the World Bank data, real GDP declined by 20.3% in 2020 and 9.5% in the first four months of 2021.[21]

Evidently, Lebanon is also the host state that is most demographically affected by the influx. The increase in the number of the Syrians seeking refuge led to long-term challenges for the Lebanese government, rendering it practically impotent in terms of providing resources for the population.[22] The political, financial, diplomatic and socio-economic crises it has been going through put strain on the public services within the country. The transportation infrastructure, electricity and water grids, and healthcare services are all affected by these issues.[23] To boot, unemployment figures are off the charts.[24] According to IMF figures, Lebanon's national debt in 2020 amounted to 162% of its GDP, making it the state with the fourth highest national debt rate in the world.[25] Although the Syrian refugees' participation in the labor force is increasing over the years, the increase in their contribution is still slow, rising from 38% in 2019 to 39% in 2020.[26] Day by day, economic instability and imbalances make

[21] "Lebanon's Economic Update — April 2021" World Bank, last modified April 2, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/economic-update-april-2021.

[22] Baylouny, Anne Marie and Stephen J. Klingseis, "Water Thieves Or Political Catalysts? Syrian Refugees In Jordan And Lebanon" *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, (Spring 2018)

[23] Isil Erol, "A Comparative Study Of Turkey, Lebanon And Jordan" *Prepositorio Institunional*, (May 2020)

[24] "How Lebanon is coping with more than a million Syrian refugees", PBS News Hour, YouTube video, 22 May 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MAHv5dWwvI.

[25] Marthin Armstrong, "Lebanon: A Country in Economic Crisis", *Statistica*, last modified August 5, 2020, https://www.statista.com/chart/22470/lebanon-gross-government-debt-as-share-gdp/.

[26] "Key Findings of the 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon" UNHCR, last modified February 16, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2020/12/VASyR-2020-Dashboard.pdf.

harsh conditions worsen further for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to UNHCR figures, 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in extreme poverty as of 2020. [27]

The healthcare system also began to have capacity related problems during this period. For instance, within the scope of the Millennium Goals the Ministry of Health had prepared regulations to restore primary and reproductive healthcare system, and to reduce infant and maternal mortality numbers. Yet, the public healthcare system suffered and did not have the opportunity to focus on these goals, mostly due to the inflow of a large number of refugees.[28]

Furthermore, the refugee crisis is seen as a threat to the confession and sect-based power-sharing arrangements which is the defining feature of the political system in Lebanon.[29] Undoubtedly, Lebanon has highly complex social structures, with a constitutional system and polarized political environment to match. Arguably, the picture became even more complicated with the refugee flows.

Every host state had different responses to the refugee crisis. In most host countries, the crisis involved more than a humanitarian issue, and evolved into major security, political and socio-economic problems, with substantial effect on the stability of these countries and beyond.[30] Against this background, this study will examine the role of the polarization in shaping Lebanese politics with respect to the response to Syrian refugees.

Following the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005, the Lebanese political landscape began to be dominated by two blocs known respectively as the March 8 Alliance and the March 14 Alliance. The former

[27] UNHCR, "Key Findings of the 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon".

[28] Erol, "A Comparative Study Of Turkey, Lebanon And Jordan", 21-22.

[29] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon,* 1.

[30] Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher, *Refugees in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 238.

embraces a supporting position towards the Syrian regime and Iran whereas the latter alliance is known for its rejection of Syrian influence in Lebanon.[31] These two blocs were the main factors shaping Lebanese politics in general for a long time, with fierce competition. The division reflected a more complex regional divide, with Iran and Syria on the one hand and conservative Arab countries on the other. Despite the cracks appearing in and transitivity of these blocs through time, they are nonetheless relevant to response on the refugee issue.[32]

1.1 Subject Matter and Statement of the Problem

Various factors play a part in shaping the attitudes towards the refugees. In Lebanon, the polarized and fragmented political environment is one of them. In particular, the lack of a common unified refugee governance is a result of the fragmented attitudes of the subnational actors and various political leaders and makes Lebanon an important case to analyze. The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, became one of the most critical issues that exacerbated the political and sectarian divergence between the supporters and opponents of the Syrian regime.[33]

In the literature the host states are mostly considered unitary actors in terms of their handling of and responses to the refugee crisis. Not many studies dwellings on Lebanese refugee policies have focused on the role of the divergent political order of the country. Without doubt, the refugee policies also get their share of effects from the fragmented political environment and confessional system in Lebanon. Political actors

[31] Bassem Ajami, "Polarized divide continues to define Lebanese politics" *The Arab Weekly*, April 17, 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/polarised-divide-continues-define-lebanese-politics.

[32] Zeynep Ş. Mencütek, "From Inaction to Restrictions: Changes in Lebanon's Policy Responses to Syrian Mass Refugee Movement" *Global Cooperation Researh Papers*, No. 19, (2017): 11, https://doi.org/10.14282/2198-0411-GCRP-19.

[33] Murat Tınas & Özlem Tür "Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions*," Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, (2021), 23:2, 321-338, DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2020.1867803 .

from different groups in Lebanon have played various important roles in shaping the response and policies regarding Syrian refugees. With the growing influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, many key political leaders tended to interpret Syrian refugees differently, bringing about a deadlock on how to respond to the influx.

The political cleavage that dominated Lebanese politics since 2005 runs along the axis running between 8 March and 14 March blocs. Briefly put, the Syrian troops' presence in Lebanon for almost three decades,[34] truly complicated Lebanon-Syria relations, paving the way for criticisms raised by some groups about the interference of Syria in the Lebanese affairs. The divisions regarding Syria's position in Lebanon escalated after the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, as it was suspected that Syria was behind the assassination.[35] Hence, Lebanon's main political deadlock emerged as the alliances under the umbrella of March 14 bloc protested against the position of the Syrian regime, whereas March 8 bloc supported the Syrian regime.[36] The deadlock made it impossible for the government to come to a consensus regarding various domestic and foreign political issues. Obviously, the blocs themselves were marred with certain disagreements within, besides the issues that united them,[37] and these disagreements continued to be effective as defections shook their unity through the years.[38] Some scholars argue that nowadays these two alliances eroded completely, because the political conditions had changed especially since 2016

[34] William Harris, "Bashar al Assad's Lebanon Gamble," *Middle East Forum*, Summer 2005.

[35] Ignacio Ramonet, "The road to Damascus" *Le Monde Diplomatic*, March 2005 .

[36] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East*, 133-135.

[37] Andre Kassas, "Lebanon: Between 8 and March... the country flew" *Lebanon 24*, March 14, 2021https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/802835/%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-14-%D9%888-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF.

[38] Paul Salem, "Defection Shakes Lebanon's March 14 Majority", *Carnegie Middle East Centre*, August 06, 2009, https://carnegie-mec.org/2009/08/06/defection-shakes-lebanon-s-march-14-majority-pub-23474.

elections,[39] where great controversy emerged within these two blocs and disagreements arose between their pillars.[40] In spite of the arguments that the initial positions of the parties involved in this division are no longer relevant, and they faced defections in time,[41] this thesis argues that the prolonged conflict in Syria and the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon has revived the polarization axis once again. The analysis of the political leaders' discourse illustrates that mainly the political parties that constitute the March 14 bloc called for the downfall of the Assad regime in Syria, whereas the political parties that constitute the March 8 bloc supported the continuation of the regime reaching to an extent whereby even Hezbollah interfered in the war alongside the Assad regime.[42]

In that way, Lebanon as a country with a confessional political system organized along sectarian lines and divided over the perception of and attitudes towards the Syrian regime, also saw the response to the Syrian refugee crisis affected by this fragmented landscape. In this context, this study aims to understand how the polarized fragmented political structure of Lebanon, marked by the division among 8 and 14 March blocs, has a role in shaping refugee policies. To do so, it analyzes the effects of the key political actors' reactions and concentrates on their discourse regarding Syrian refugees.

1.2 Research Objective and Questions

The Syrian refugee crisis continues to be a significant topic in both the regional and international arena as the Syrian Civil War continued for more than a decade

[39] Firas Alshawfi, "The death of 8 and 14 March", *Al-Akhbar*, October 19, 2016, https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/221019.

[40] Kassem Kassir, "After the final death of 8 and 14 March, where does the political party map in Lebanon head towards?" *Al-Amaan*, 2016, http://al-aman.com/portal/ar-LB/4/.

[41] Saad Elyas, "8 and 14 March after 12 years: the Seperation" *AlQuds*, March 11, 2017, https://www.alquds.co.uk/%ef%bb%bf8-.

[42] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 133-135.

without any political solution yet. Different host states extended different responses to the crisis. The refugees who escape from armed conflicts, political violence, and wars to find safety and secure their life, are subject to different interpretations and treatments from the host states, without the assurance of international protection. As the global trends demonstrate that displacement will continue to rise over the next decade due to growing populations, natural disasters, climate change, rising food prices and conflicts over scarce resources, it is important to investigate the response of the host states and the major factors that affect their responses. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate Lebanon's response to the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and identify as well as explain the dynamics which played a role in the response to and the governance of the refugee crisis. The overall objective is to shed light on the variation in the discourses of political leaders in relationship to the polarized divide that define the Lebanese politics since 2005.

In this regard, this study aims to ask the question of how the Lebanese refugee policy has been affected by the fragmented political environment of Lebanon, and to highlight the discourses of various political leaders. The efforts will unveil how such discourses were influenced by the hitherto fragmented Lebanese political environment, now faced with the Syrian refugee crisis.

1.3 Methodology

This study employs qualitative critical discourse analysis based on the case of Lebanon. The critical analysis of the political leaders' discourses is applied in order to answer the main question of the study that intends to show the connection between the political divide among the supporters and the opponents of the Syrian regime, and the refugee perceptions. The critical discourse analysis is conducted to unveil the connections between the discourse and the social, historical, and political context.[43]

The data corpus for this study is comprised of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the speeches by the leaders, broadcast on local television

[43] Van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, (London: Sage Publications. 1993), 300-305.

news and social media platforms. The secondary sources include books, academic studies, and newspaper articles and reports. For the purposes of this study, the rhetoric of four key political leaders from different political backgrounds, after the Syrian refugee influx into Lebanon starting from 2011 constitute the empirical material of the analysis. The analysis revealed the different framing of refugees in both a humanitarian perspective and a political one. The discourses of these four political figures were derived out of their speeches delivered in assemblies, conferences, interviews, along with their personal tweets. The speeches were collected from a range of news media sources. To analyze the representation of refugees in the political leaders' rhetoric, social media was also closely monitored. The speeches delivered between the years 2011 and 2021 were gathered and analyzed. The inadequate availability of comprehensive databases necessitated the use of various sources in the form of news articles, local television news, and interviews to come up with a rather comprehensive compendium of speeches and rhetoric. Any quotes provided in the study are either obtained from the English version of the speech, or translated by the author, who is a native speaker of Arabic. The analysis of the four leading political figures' discourses centered on how their rhetoric on the displaced Syrians was shaped by their political interests in the light of the polarized divide along the perception of the Syrian regime.

Considering the period under study, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and the Leader of the Free Patriotic Movement and Christian community, Gebran Bassil, and the Secretary General of Hezbollah and Shiite community, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah were chosen as the supporters of the Syrian regime. On the other hand, the then Prime Minister of Lebanon and the leader of the Future Movement which is a powerful political party within the Sunni bloc, Saad Hariri, and the leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Druze religious community, Walid Jumblatt, were chosen as opponents of the Syrian regime during the Syrian crisis. These political leaders were chosen because they were the ones most engaged in the Syrian refugee issues in Lebanon. Gebran Bassil and Hassan Nasrallah stand against the presence of the Syrian refugees, while Walid Jumblat and Saad Hariri expressed sympathy for them. Among the four, Bassil and Nasrallah are deemed to be affiliated with the March 8 bloc, while Hariri and Jumblaat are deemed to be affiliated with the March 14 bloc, even though transitivity and changes on positions were observed at

times. For instance, even though Walid Jumblatt is perceived to be the weathervane of Lebanese politics due to the frequency of his position shifts in the political sides,[44] in this thesis he was selected to be on the side of the March 14 block as his interests coincided mostly with that alliance as he increasingly criticized the Assad regime and advocated the need for political reforms in Syria.[45] It is important to note that, at the outset of the Syrian crisis, Jumblatt described the uprising in Syria as the external powers' conspiracy to divide the country and in this context he met with Assad. However, with the spillover of the conflict and becoming vociferous in the domestic politics of Lebanon, Jumblatt instantly shifted his position against the Syrian regime.[46] Subsequently he became more vocal in his discourse by standing with the Syrian refugees and criticizing the Syrian regime by calling for the immediate removal of Assad.[47] The importance of analyzing the popular and influential political leaders' stance lies in the fact that the governance of refugees was left to subnational variation after the 2014 October Policy,[48] allowing different political figures to interpret the refugee issues in different ways.

The analysis is based on the hypothesis that the political interests of the leaders in Lebanon have played an important role in framing the issue of Syrian refugees. The conducted analysis reveals the differences regarding the refugee discourse between the two political blocs in Lebanon. The political leaders of March 8 bloc who support the Syrian regime have had a negative perspective towards the refugees, and often described them as a 'burden' and 'threat' to the nation, while the political leaders that are considered to be affiliated with the March 14 bloc opposing the Syrian regime have

[44] Rabecca A. Hopkins, "Lebanon and Uprising in Syria: Issue for Congress", *Congressional Research Service*, February 2, 2012, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc93922/.

[45] Hopkins, "Lebanon and Uprising in Syria: Issue for Congress".

[46] Tınas & Tür "Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions".

[47] Hopkins, "Lebanon and the Uprising in Syria: Issue for Congress".

[48] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan"

had a more positive perception of refugees, with frequent references to humanitarian narratives.

1.4 Preview of Chapters

This thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. This introductory chapter concisely provided insights into the aim, importance, and methodology of the study. The second chapter examines the role of the political system and different political figures, on the refugee policies in Lebanon. Essential background information about the modern history of Lebanon in the context of relations with Syria is also provided. A brief picture of the Lebanese response to the Syrian refugee flow and the policies that it has implemented, along with the legal status of the Syrians and their conditions in Lebanon is also presented. The subsequent two chapters discuss the discourses of the four selected political leaders as they often used a divisive and polarized language. Their reactions are reviewed, along with a juxtaposition with different speeches of political figures on the topic of Syrian refugees' influx into Lebanon. After the discourse analysis of the four political leaders, the concluding chapter analyzes the differences between their discourses and the connections with their political interests. The repercussions of the fragmented political environment on the refugees and the importance of global refugee governance are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lebanon is an Arab country in the Middle East, with a tumultuous history. The country has a lot of baggage from its past, and still feels the strain of the consequences.[49] Structurally it is a weak and unstable state where the domestic political alignments are based on fragile and inflammable sectarian relations.[50] The country's political system is based on confessional/sectarian affiliations, leading to a most delicate balance of power. To boot, the country also went through the collapse of the political system in recent decades. Within this context, Lebanon experienced various political, social, and economic crises, military clashes and civil wars. In the last decade, the country has been going through political, economic, and social crises, and has been suffering from corruption, clientelism, and failed government institutions. Besides, Lebanon is on the edge of becoming a 'failed state' in the face of a number of challenges in recent years, such as the ongoing popular uprising (thawra) that started in 2019 against the government of the day, not to mention the economic and financial crisis, which is worsening each day, the COVID-19 pandemic, the 4 August, 2021 Beirut explosion, and the subsequent governmental crises. According to some scholars, the country has not witnessed a worse catastrophe in its history, the civil war between 1975 and 1990 included.

In the light of the complicated political structure and the escalation of the political and the socio-economic crisis that Lebanon has been facing, one can safely say that the country has been significantly strained on the political, economical, and humanitarian fronts in the aftermath of the massive influx of the Syrian refugees into

[49] Bilal, Malaeb, "State fragility in Lebanon: Proximate causes and sources of resilience" *International Growth Center*, April, 2018, https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Lebanon-country-report.pdf.

[50] Paul Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?" *Carnegie Middle East Center*, December 11, 2012, https://carnegie-mec.org/2012/12/11/can-lebanon-survive-syrian-crisis-pub-50298.

into the country since 2011.[51] Lebanon is one of the important cases in terms of analyzing refugee governance as it is widely accepted to have failed in terms of framing refugee policies. The sectarian aspect of the Lebanese politics played a challenging role in governing the Syrian refugee crisis.[52] In a sense, the political alignments in Lebanon are based on the pro-Assad and anti-Assad regime camps.[53] It is no surprise that this division came to shape the Syrian refugee regime as well. The political leaders in Lebanon have struggled to come up with a common solution to the Syrian refugee crisis. For a long time, they followed a policy of not creating a policy to deal with the crisis as one of the political blocs vehemently opposed the Syrian regime, and the other bluntly backed it.[54]

At the same time, as the unabated refugee flows from Syria to Lebanon began to impose a heavy burden on the already politically and economically fragile country. In this context, the Lebanese political leaders' discourses regarding the refugees became increasingly vociferous. Such discourses, as the subsequent chapters will show, have been shaped by the existing fragmented political structure and the previous relations with Syria. Undoubtedly, the voices of different political leaders also affected the framing of the refugee regime. It would be more accurate to say that the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon was no longer discussed with reference to humanitarian concerns only, and the refugee identity was politicized by associating their presence with various political or sectarian factions.[55]

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[51] Jose Pelayo, "The EU-Lebanon's Multilateral Refugee Governance: Buiıness as Usual Or Political Solutions?", *Harvard Internation Review*, 39, no. 3, (Summer 2018): 39-43.

[52] Tınas, "Syrians in Lebanon from the perspectives of the Lebanese government and Lebanese Society,"

[53] Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?"

[54] Maja Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response: Negotiating Status and Registration in Lebanon," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 22, no. 3 (November 17, 2017): 393–419, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1371140.

[55] Filippo Diogini, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience," *LSE Middle East Centre Paper, (*February 2016): 7.

Hence, the response of Lebanon to the mass flow of the Syrian refugees by examining the discourse of the political leaders towards the Syrian refugees with reference to their historical ties with Syria can only be analyzed once the historical background is depicted briefly. This chapter will thus briefly summarize the modern history of Lebanon since the days of the French Mandate to the present, the formation of the country's fragmented political structure, the characteristics of the Lebanese political system, the Lebanese-Syrian relations before the Syrian Civil War, and the political atmosphere in Lebanon during the civil war. Further, this chapter will describe the extent and effects of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon by elaborating the evolution of its response to Syrians' mass influx to Lebanon.

2.1 Modern Lebanese History

After the First World War, the San Remo Conference culminated with the decision to establish mandate governments in Syria, Iraq and Palestine, which were among the pieces of land taken from the Ottoman Empire.[56] Ottoman Syria, including what later became Lebanon, was left to French mandate. However, today's Lebanese territories were not formally joined with Syria under the mandate regime. Upon establishing control over the area, the French wanted to establish a federal system under the umbrella of Syria by establishing an Alawite State in northwest Syria, a Sunni State in the center and a Durzi State in the south. They also tried to establish a Christian State outside of these areas. For this purpose, the French formed the borders of the Lebanese State by uniting the Bekaa in the east and the coastal areas in the west and the lands including Tripolisam, Tire and Sayda.

Consequently Lebanon came under the French Mandate which was officially known as *'Mandat Français en Syrie et au Liban*', and Lebanon's current geographical borders and fragmented social structure were shaped during this period.[57]

[56] William Harris; *Lebanon: A History 600-2011*, (New York: Oxford Press,2012): 29-146.

[57] "About Lebanon: Administrative Division," The Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), accessed May 05, 2021, www.cas.gov.lb.

Consociational/Confessional democracy, which is the source of lots of problems in Lebanon, is an artifact of this period.

Lebanon's constitution was based on that of the French Third Republic. The constitution associated political representation with sectarian and confessional lines as per the results of the 1932 census.[58] Although the country had no official census since 1932, according to the World Bank data as of 2020 the population of Lebanon, home to the biggest Christian population in the Middle East, is almost 6.830.000.[59] The country is also home to 18 officially recognized communities.[60]

While Christian community in Lebanon is divided into a large number of sects including the Maronites, the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Apostolics, Greek Melkite Catholics, the Roman Catholics, the Coptic, the Syrian Orthodox and the Armenian Orthodox, Muslims in the country belong to either to the Sunni or the Shiite branch. In addition to this, Druzes – also constitute a substantial portion of the population. Finally, the country is home to some Jews.

At the beginning of the French Mandate, Druzes and Maronites had privileges in Lebanon. These privileges also translated into economic and political powers. However, in time, due to the differences in birth rates and migrations, the Druzes and the Maronites started to lose demographic dominance in the country vis-à-vis the Muslims. However, they clang onto the political representation powers, which were defined according to the census. This is why no official census has been carried out in Lebanon since 1932.

During the Second World War, with France falling under occupation by the Nazi Germany in 1941, the nationalist movement in Lebanon saw a historical opportunity. Lebanon's different groups united against the French Mandate, forming

[58] Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968):121.

[59] "Population, Total - Lebanon | Data," The World Bank, accessed November 2, 2021, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LB.

[60] Ann Malaspina, *Creation of the Modern Middle East: Lebanon*, (New York: Chelsa House Publications, 2008): 11.

the unwritten Lebanese National Pact and declaring independence in 1943. Lebanese National Pact effectively instituted confessional government based on the religious groups' ratio in the society according to the results of the 1932 census.[61]

According to Lebanon's unwritten National Pact, the President should be a Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister should be a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament should be a Shiite Muslim.[62] The first elections organized saw the election of Lebanon's first president and its own parliament. The parliament then duly changed the constitution and ended the French Mandate, on the basis of the principle of self-determination on November 8, 1943.[63] Lebanon became officially independent on November 22, 1943, as a consociational democracy based on 'republican, representative, parliamentary, democratic liberal and confessional characteristics'.[64]

Another turning point for Lebanon's history is the birth of the state of Israel in 1948. The development is called the independence war of Israel by Israelis, and the "Nakba" (disaster) by Palestinians. It triggered a response on part of some Arab countries including Lebanon, which declared a war on Israel in order to protect and support Palestinians.[65] The long-term effects of the war for Lebanon were heavier than those suffered by the other states involved.

After the war Lebanon faced an influx of thousands of Palestinians. The Palestinian refugees brought along the conflict with Israel. In addition to this, the influx of Palestinians deepened the fragmented political and social structure problem of Lebanon, as the sects' population figures were crucial in the confessional system in terms of establishing their representation rates. The Palestinians who fled Israel, in

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[61] Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies, (*London: Zed Books, 1994), *23*.

[62] Malaspina, *Creation*, 12.

[63] Malaspina, *Creation*, 50.

[64] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 131.

[65] Malaspina, *Creation*, 58.

turn, were mostly Sunni Muslims. This is why the refugee influx had the potential to change the balance of power in Lebanon in favor of the Sunnis.[66]

During the process which led to the independence some paramilitary organizations along the sectarian lines had already emerged due to the fragmented structure of the country. For example, the Phalanga Party, also known as the *"Kataeb"* was founded by Pierre Gemayel in 1936 as the paramilitary youth organization of the Maronites. Another religious based organization was the Progressive Socialist Party of the Druze, founded by Kamal Jumblatt in 1949.[67] In time, two main camps appeared to dominate the scene in Lebanon: the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) –a left-wing group founded by Kamal Jumblatt in 1969–, and the Lebanese Front –the right-wing coalition of Christian groups.

During this period, the ideology of Arab nationalism became dominant in the Middle East, advocating the rights of Palestinians more loudly. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was also established to fight for the rights and territorial claims of the Palestinians. Lebanon cautiously supported the creation of the PLO and showed this support by giving them a chance to set up offices and a research center in Beirut, with the proviso that the PLO would not carry out guerilla activities against Israel out of Lebanon. These developments further complicated the already complex political and social structure of Lebanon.

By 1970s, the confessional governmental system of Lebanon established in 1943, directly based on the country's demography, no longer reflected the current picture in the country.[68] This created tensions and polarization in the country between the supporters and the challengers of the existing confessional system. This fault line became a more and more prominent parameter in determining domestic and foreign policy positions of the country. Basically, the left-wing Lebanese National Movement

[66] MacQueen and Baxter, "Refugees and Political Stability in Lebanon," *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 6, No 1, (August 2014): 49.

[67] Malaspina, *Creation*, 54.

[68] Malaspina, *Creation*, 74.

(LNM), mainly supported by the Shiite Amal Movement backed by Syria's ruling Ba'ath Party and the PLO was against the status quo and the confessional system in Lebanon. On the other hand, the right-wing Lebanese Front, comprised of Christian groups, including but not limited to Christian Phalangists, and backed by militias known as the "Lebanese Forces", wanted to sustain the confessional system with Christian leadership.[69]

Without a doubt, this fragmented condition of Lebanon and the organizational divisions on political and social matters increased tensions among the groups, leading to Lebanese Civil War, which broke out in 1975. The first incident of the war was the attack by Phalangists against Karantina –a poor neighborhood mainly inhabited by Sunni Muslims. The PLO responded to this attack. This was not a surprise for some, as the presence of the Palestinian refugees and the PLO are often considered the primary causes of the Lebanese Civil War. For instance, in the words of Macqueen and Baxter, "the expression of Palestinians militancy within Lebanon helped precipitate the Lebanese civil war of 1975".[70] However, it is also argued that Lebanon's confessional system that entrenches sectarian divisions played a crucial role comparable to that of the Palestinian refugees and the PLO.[71]

Furthermore, the conflict atmosphere of Lebanon made the country more susceptible to foreign intervention. Its geographical proximity to occupying forces like Israel and Syria creates extraordinary effects on the country. These all made Lebanon more fragile than before, destroyed the already frail control the state had on most of its territories. The loss of control served as a de facto invitation for direct or proxy invasions or disruption by other states such as Syria, Israel, and Iran.[72] As a result,

[69] Malaspina, *Creation*, 76.

[70] MacQueen and Baxter, "Refugees and Political Stability in Lebanon," 51.

[71] Tamirace, Fakhoury, "Debating Lebanon's Power sharing, Model: an Opportunity or an Impasse for Democratizatıon Studies in The Middle East?", *Arab Studies Institute*, 22, no. 1,(Spring, 2014): 235 .

[72] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 134.

direct Syrian military intervention began in June 1976 with the entry of Syrian tanks to Lebanese soil. Then, Israel captured southern Lebanon in 1978 using the PLO's attacks as a pretext. The invasion of southern Lebanon by Israel was followed by the birth of another important political, social, and military actor in Lebanon: Hezbollah, the Party of God, founded by Shiite leaders with the support of Iran in southern Lebanon, initially as a movement of resistance against Israeli occupation.

The Lebanese Civil War that began in 1975 lasted 15 years, to end finally in 1989 with Taif Agreement, which officially appointed Syria as the guarantor of peace for a limited time. Syria took the opportunity to both politically and militarily control the country.[73]

In 1989, both Arab and international community called for eirenicon for all factors in Lebanon.[74] After this call, the representatives of Lebanon's parliament met in Taif, Saudi Arabia and reached an accord. Briefly put, the Taif Agreement revised the weights of the groups in the representative system, and provided a road map for the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. The number of seats reserved in the Lebanese parliament for the members of the Muslim community was increased to match that of the Christian community, to reflect the changes in the population.[75]

[73] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 132.

[74] Malaspina, *Creation*, 77-98.

[75] İlker Salih Ebrem, "Suriye Krizinin Etki Alanındaki Ülke: Lübnan", *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 10, no.3 (2021): 2079.

Table 2. 1. Confessional division of the Lebanese Parliament[76]

	1972* Parliament	1989 Ta'if Accord	1990 Vacancies
Confession			
Christians			
Maronite	30	30	12**
Orthodox	11	11	4
Catholic	6	6	0
Armenian Orthodox	4	4	0
Armenian Catholic	1	1	1
Protestant	1	1	0
Other***	1	1	0
Subtotal	**54**	**54**	**17**
Muslims			
Sunni	20	22	5
Shia	19	22	3
Druze	6	8	5
Alawi	0	2	0
Subtotal	**45**	**54**	**13**
Total	**99**	**108**	**30**

Crucially, the agreement gave Lebanon another opportunity to exercise its sovereignty over its territories. According to Baylouny, the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 till 1989, with a particularly intensive period in 1975-76, ended with the labeling of Syrian forces as an occupying force, and with revising the 'distribution of power among sects' with regard to the confessional system.[77] According to Rabah, the Taif Agreement effectively brought peace to all parts of Lebanon and silenced the guns.[78]

Once the civil war ended, Lebanese people felt complete exhaustion with political and armed conflicts, and the demand for stability in politics increased. The expectations of Lebanese people were reflected on their political choices, giving a chance to new politicians by voting old ones out of office. At this time, Rafiq Hariri arrived on the Lebanese political scene with his own characteristic approach, and a cult of personality to match. He became the Prime Minister of Lebanon in 1992. Between 1992 and 2004, Lebanon experienced stability while Rafiq Hariri gained the sympathy and approval of many citizens thanks to his politics. The national identity

[76] Norton, *Hezbollah,* 463.

[77] Anne Marie Baylouny, *When Blame Bacfires: Syrian Refugees and Citizen Grievances in Jordan and Lebanon,* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2020), 31.

[78] Makram Rabah, *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites and Collective Memory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 292.

and sovereignty of Lebanon were his priorities and constituted the core of his ideas. For him to realize his aims based on these ideas, Syrian troops had to leave. So Hariri guided public opinion and tried to build international pressure around the issue.[79] Then, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1559, which focused on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, establishing Lebanon's sovereignty, and supporting free and fair electoral process. However, these developments were not welcomed by all actors. This process also prepared the suspicious assassination of Hariri in 2005, which revived the anti-Syrian sentiments and divided the country between the supporters (March 8 Bloc) and the opponents (March 14 Bloc) of the Syrian regime.[80]

2.2 Lebanese Political System

Lebanese political system and civil administration have distinctive characteristics, which are based on the country's demography and structural religious composition. The unique fragmented conditions on the political front stemming from the country's history also affect the political, economic and social power distribution in Lebanon. Political powers are divided within the framework of proportional balancing among the elected representatives of the religious sects, through the confessional system. The competition and of the inability to reach consensus among the religious groups cause political crises as well as other problems for Lebanon.

The confessional system which emerged in 1926 during the French Mandate, and formalized with the National Pact in 1943 became as one of the defining characteristics of Lebanon. In this system, political representation is shared among the religious sects, and the seats of parliament are distributed at a ratio of 6 to 5 in favor of Christians. This fundamental practice provides a significant example of how the Lebanese political system affects the fragmented society and politics. Therefore, it is

[79] Ebrem, "Lübnan," 2079.

[80] Harris, "Assad's Lebanon Gamble,".

safe to say that Lebanon's mixed societal structure has direct repercussions on its political system, and vice versa.

The aim of the confessional system in Lebanon was to prevent disputes between diverse communities.[81] The political parties shaped along confessional or communal lines, and the political leaders are adamant in their communal affiliations.[82] There are officially 18 sects in Lebanese political system, sharing seats in the parliament. The most prominent ones are Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and Druzes. This produced a fragmented sectarian-based political system rather than a unified one. In such a system, the political parties' intentions and will are concentrated on securing their own permanence and prominence in the national government, rather than ruling the country effectively.[83]

The system, which is based on the 1932 population census, increase concerns about a new official census which can potentially affect the proportional power distribution among the dominant and subordinate groups, weakening or enhancing the balances given the distorted political culture. Since the President acts as not only as the balancer, but also the representative of the most influential group in the country,[84] a new population census could also deepen the fragmentation in the society by revising the political power distribution, and escalating concerns about political abuse by one and another of these groups.

[81] "Report on Religious Freedom in Lebanon", The Instıtute on Religion and Public Policy, accessed February 2, 2022, http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session9/LB/IRPP_InstituteforReligionandPublicPolicy.pdf.

[82] Jeremy Jones, *Negotiating Change: The New Politics of Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 104.

[83] Jeremy Jones, *Negotiating Change*, 109.

[84] Michael C. Hudson, "Democracy and Social Mobilization in Lebanese Politics", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Jan., 1969): 250.

2.2.1 The Characteristics of the Lebanese Political System and Its Implications

As Lebanon's sect-based structures dating back to the days of the French mandate gained ground, the governmental institutions evolved in the a de facto lack of a unitary state, with each institution falling under the control of the political extensions of different sectarian groups. Besides other outcomes such as civil wars and political conflicts, the fragile system has also heavily influenced the foreign affairs of the country.[85]

The political struggles among the sects affected Lebanon's relations with other countries in a number of ways. Political ties and rapport built with other countries duly triggered tensions within Lebanon and increased domestic conflicts, which enabled third countries to interfere in the political vacuum. For instance, according to Hudson, the divide between Christians and Muslims, exacerbated by French policies which were biased in favor of the Christian community in Lebanon, created a certain political schizophrenia with the Christians generally looking toward the West and the Muslims toward the Arab East."[86]

One can forcefully argue that the sectarian based political conflicts hindered stability, peace and welfare in Lebanon. The considerable damaging effect of the system revealed itself with the 1975 civil war, which came with significant sectarian overtones. The developments in the country also enabled interventions on part of its neighbors. The increase in the number of Palestinians in the country, as a result of the 1948 war, escalated tensions within the country, and, in a sense, facilitated interventions by neighboring powers as Lebanon fell into turmoil after 1975. Syria's intervention to Lebanon, which lasted from 1976 to 2005, as well as Israeli occupation between 1978 and 2000 hindered the country's progress towards stability and peace.

The civil war brought awareness for the need of change in the fragmented structure of Lebanon, so as to achieve a functioning and rather equal power sharing

[85] Ralph E. Crow, "Religious Sectarianism in the Lebanese Political System," *The Journal of Politics*, 24, No. 3 (Aug., 1962): 489-520.

[86] Michael C. Hudson, "Palestinians and Lebanon: The Common Story*", Journal of Refugee Studies*, 10, No. 3, (1997): 247, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/10.3.24.

arrangement among various sects and religions in the country. The Taif Agreement signed on the basis of equal participation of Muslim and Christian delegates in 1989, with a view to ending the war and laying down the foundations of new Lebanese politics, was also not sharply dissociated from the confessional system. With Taif Agreement, the basic principles of the previous power-sharing system were preserved. However, the political power among the major confessions, Maronite, Sunni, and Shi'a was redistributed. The previous 6:5 Parliament seat distribution ratio was replaced by an arrangement stipulating equal distribution between Christians and Muslims. The number of seats in the parliament was also increased from 99 to 108 and ultimately to 128.[87]

The changes introduced in the Taif Agreement were not enough to eliminate all political problems, and most crucially, could not establish a lasting political balance in the society, along the confessional lines. The fragility and the inherent instability of the system showed itself once more with the 2006 Lebanon War, which resulted with thousands of deaths and displaced persons, including severe infrastructural damage in the country.

One should also note that Lebanon's geographical location does not help in terms of its vulnerability to conflicts. In this context it is noteworthy that the civil wars led to higher rates of displacement among the Christians compared to other groups, while various conflicts and wars in the Middle East increased migration to Lebanon, leading to an increase in the number of Muslims in the country. In a nutshell, Lebanese political system's sectarian character should be discussed with reference to the developments in the country, since the changes in its environment also increase its political, economic and military vulnerability.

[87] Marie-Joelle Zahar, *Power Sharing in Lebanon: Foreign Protectors, Domestic Peace, and Democratic Failure*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

2.3 The Lebanese Syrian Relations

To better understand Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, not to mention the nature of its political system, one should also examine Lebanon's relationships with Syria.[88] The bilateral relations between Lebanon and Syria has deep roots. Undoubtedly Syria is the most prominent regional power which had a lasting involvement in Lebanese politics.[89] Syria's attempts to interfere in the domestic affairs of Lebanon are based on its rather unique perspective towards Lebanon, refusing to recognize it as a separate entity, based on a number of historical claims.[91] Syria's military presence in Lebanon began in 1976, when it sent troops during the Lebanon civil war.[90] The Taif Agreement that ended the civil war in Lebanon in 1989 recognized Syria's position as the official protector of peace, giving it the opportunity to control the country both politically and militarily.[91] Lebanon's relations with Syria were further reinforced in the 1990s, with May 1991 Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination; September 1991 Defense and Security Pact; September 1993 Economic and Social Accords; and 1994 Bilateral Agreement in the Field of Labor.[92] The Treaty of Brotherhood provided the legal grounds for continuing Syrian military presence in Lebanon. At that time, the Lebanese politicians were divided as either supporters or opponents of Syria's influence in the country. The coalitions, which, at a time, dominated the politics of Lebanon along the lines of support for or opposition against the Assad regime in Syria, have revived in 2005 after the assassination of

[88] Tamirace Fakhoury, "Governace Strategies and Refugee Response: Lebanon In The Face Of Syrian Displacement," *International Journal of Middle East*, (October, 2017): 683.

[89] Tinas, "Syrians in Lebanon from the perspectives of the Lebanese government and Lebanese Society," 16.

[90] Harris, *Faces of Lebanon: Sects, Wars, and Global Extensions*, (Princeton, NJ: M. Wiener, 1997), 261-2.

[91] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 132.

[92] Harris, "Assad's Lebanon Gamble,".

Hariri.[93] Against this background, the relationship between Lebanon and Syria, which affected Lebanon's domestic as well as foreign policy, and the division between Syrian regime's supporters and opponents, which shaped the country's domestic politics, will be illustrated to provide the historical background.

Throughout the history, the powers ruling the region did not really consider Syria and Lebanon as separate entities. The independence was the key turning point in the relations between Lebanon and Syria. Before independence, the term Syria was understood to refer to a larger geographic area that also included areas which now constitute Lebanon and other countries extending into the Arabian Peninsula.[94] However, the relations between Lebanon and Syria were highly susceptible to the social and religious substrates that constituted the area and the relations between ethnic and religious including Muslims, Christians, Jews and a host of ethnic minorities.

The legal act that constituted the basis of the independence of Lebanon was the dissociation of Lebanon from greater Syria, by France. France wanted the borders in the area be based on ethnic and religious lines to insure the political and military stability of its presence in the area. However, the claims of Lebanese Maronites extended to parts of greater Syria as well. These actions caused irritation of their Syrian neighbor. Finally, the extension of the borders of the greater Lebanon, which were dominated by Christians, caused friction with Muslim inhabitants in those areas. In other words, the extension of Lebanese borders triggered the confrontation between Syrian Arab nationalists and Lebanese particularism.[95] However, the tensions would remain on hold till two events unfolded, leading to a transformation of the relations in 1976. These were the rise of Hafez al Assad in Syria, and the civil war in Lebanon. The Syrian regime found some ground to legitimize its intervention in the form of the invitation by the Lebanese President. As the Syrian army entered Lebanon through the

[93] Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?".

[94] William Harris, *The Levant: A Fractured Mosaic*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003): 2.

[95] Eyal Zisser, *The Challange of Independence*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 6.

Beqaa Valley, April of 1976 marked the beginning of Syrian occupation that would last for the better part of three decades.[96]

Following the Syrian invasion, an Arab summit was held to mitigate the local damage on the area. The summit concluded with a major advantage for the Syrian regime, as the powers attending the summit agreed on the establishment of Arab Deterrent Force in Lebanon, which would be composed of Syrian troops and funded by the Gulf countries. The period following the year 1984 would also enrich the Syrian dominance in Lebanon due to the divergence of forces within Lebanon.

As the civil war ended in 1989, it was replaced by the Ta'if period involving a number of political reforms to be implemented till 1993. By then Rafiq al Hariri rose to prominence in Lebanon, representing yet another turning points in the relations between Syria and Lebanon. Hariri's government introduced a 10-year economic program that aimed to save the economy. Syrian regime had its own reasons for opting for Rafiq al Hariri: Economic stability of Lebanon would also help stability and economy of Syria.

The economic reform program introduced by Hariri, however, drew its share of criticisms, and by the year 2000 Rafiq Hariri would add his voice to those questioning Bashar al Assad's policies, which proved to be very similar to those of his father. Exposing the Syrian regime's preference for the presidency of Lahoud,[97] Rafiq Hariri and Walid Jumblatt started to vehemently oppose Syrian involvement in Lebanon. Walid Jumblatt had been a consistent opposition to Syrian actions and involvement in Lebanon.[98] Rafiq Hariri raised his voice on different occasions about the bluster of Syria, whereby Assad threatened him if Syria's desire for the presidency of Lahoud was left unfulfilled.[100] Following the election of Lahoud, Rafiq al Hariri resigned. Salim al-Hoss followed him quickly.

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[96] Harris, *Faces of Lebanon: Sects, Wars and Global Extensions*, 165-166.

[97] Tom Pierre Najem, *Lebanon's Renaissance: The Political Economy of Reconstruction*, (Ithaca Press, 2000), 94-96.

[98] Harris, "Assad's Lebanon Gamble,".

Early 2000s saw the buildup of tensions among groups for and against the Treaty of Brotherhood signed between the two countries in 1991, making Syrian presence in Lebanon a hot topic. In the presence of a UN Security Council resolution requiring Syria to withdraw from Lebanon,[99] the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri led to uprisings called the Cedar Revolution, leading to the termination of Syrian occupation of Lebanon.[100] The assassination can be described as a turning point, and led to a division among the political parties over support for (March 8 bloc) or opposition against (March 14 bloc) the Syrian regime,[101] as it was a very fitting suspect to be involved in Hariri's assassination.[102] The pressure for Syrian withdrawal had increased drastically, and culminated in the withdrawal of the Syrian armies from Lebanon by the year 2005.[103]

Syria-Lebanon relations significantly deteriorated after Syrian troops departed Lebanon, which sparked a verbal war between Syrian and Lebanese politicians, as well as the return of thousands of Syrian workers to their homeland.[104] Following these events, and in spite of the ambiguity of delineation of Lebanese-Syrian territorial borders and unregulated border crossing,[105] the diplomatic relations commenced with

[99] Mencütek, Refugee *Governance,* 133.

[100] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan".

[101] Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?".

[102] Robert Fisk, "Who killed Mr. Lebanon?: The Hunt for Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri‟s Assasins", *The Independent*, January 11, 2009, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/who-killed-mr-lebanon-the-hunt-for-prime-minister-rafiq-hariri-s-assassins-1231542.html.

[103] Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon: The Assasination of Rafik Hariri and Its Impact on the Middle East*, (Boomsbury Publishing, 2008)112-122.

[104] Fakhoury, "Governace Strategies and Refugee Response," 684.

[105] Fakhoury, "Governace Strategies and Refugee Response," 688.

the opening of Syria's first diplomatic mission in Lebanon in 2008.[106] Over the years, the political divisions regarding Syria's role have intensified and spread to other domestic and foreign policy areas.[107]

In brief, Syrian-Lebanese relations have affected the foreign and domestic policies of Lebanon and the political environment of the country for more than 15 years. Finally, it is evident that Syrian Lebanese relations went through an undeniable intervention on part of the Syrian regime in Lebanese affairs, shaping Lebanese politics for the years to come.

2.4 Lebanon in the Face of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

More than a decade passed since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, which left millions of Syrians displaced.[108] The Syrian crisis is now recognized as the largest humanitarian emergency in effect, as it rendered 6.5 million Syrians to be displaced within Syria,[109] and more than 6.6 million Syrians refugees in 126 countries around the globe.[110] Lebanon, as the country that hosts most refugees per area and population,[111] has faced various difficulties in responding to the mass and sudden refugee flow from Syria. This inability is caused by various aspects of Lebanese political system, as well

[106] Diogini, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon," 30.

[107] Fakhoury, Governace Strategies and Refugee Response," 684.

[108] Mario Einaudi, "Syria and the Middle East: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Asylum Seekers in Long-Term Global Crises" *Center For International Studies*, Cornell University CornellCast Video, May 4, 2016 https://www.cornell.edu/video/syria-middle-east-refugees-conflict-displacement.

[109] M. Szmigiera, "Internally Displaced Persons in Syria 2019," *Statista,* August 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/740245/number-of-internally-displaced-persons-in-syria/.

[110] "The World's Refugees in Numbers", Amnesty International, 2019, .https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts/.

[111] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East*, 129.

as other difficulties such as its fragile economic state, inadequate infrastructure and governance capabilities. One can forcefully argue that, among Syria's neighbors, Lebanon is the one state to be affected most by the spillover of the Syrian conflict.[112] The state is fragile and instable; the sectarian tensions are inevitable both in politics and daily life;[113] and the primary political blocs (March 8 and March 14) have taken sides bluntly supporting or rejecting Syrian regime.[113] Given the fact that the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon have reached to one-third of Lebanese population as the official figures provided by the Lebanese government show that the country is hosting 1.5 Syrian refugees, the country has been exposed to great strains.[114]

According to UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) figures, there are 879,598 Syrian refugees currently hosted in Lebanon, along with 31,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA).[115] The Lebanese authorities state that approximately 550,000 unregistered refugees who entered the country illegally are also in Lebanon. The real number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is hard to establish as UNHCR officially stopped registering them at the request of the Lebanese Government in 2015. The number is still staggering as shown in Figure 3, in Lebanon there are 156 Syrian refugees for every 1000 inhabitants (See Figure 3). Consequently, Lebanon has been affected the most in the world as it shares the highest number of refugees per capita,[116]

[112] Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?".

[113] Melani Cammett, "Lebanon, the Sectarian Identity Test Lab," *The Century Foundation*, April 10, 2019.

[114] Nour Shawaf and Francesca El Asmar, "'We're not There Yet…' Voices of refugees from Syria in Lebanon", *OXFAM Research Report*, May 31, 2017 https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/file_attachments/rr-voices-syria-lebanon-refugees-protection-310517-en.pdf .

[115] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 129.

[116] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, xii.

on a very small territory, as the apparently endless arrival of Syrians has created social, economic and political pressure.[117]

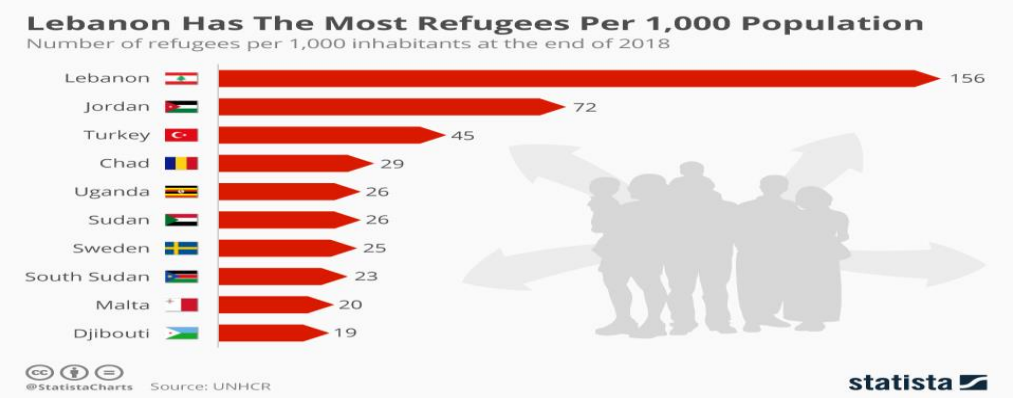


Figure 2. 1 Lebanon has the most refugees per 1,000 population[118]

2.4.1. Lebanon and the international refugee law

International law provides the refugees with the right to request asylum and the right not to be forcibly repatriated. The protection provided by the 1951 United Nations convention applied to all refugees regardless of their background. Ironically, however, Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee convention and has not signed its 1967 Protocol, in spite of hosting unprecedented number of refugees per capita. It insists on rejecting international regulation and protection of refugees, asserting that Lebanon is not a country of asylum.[119] In this context, Lebanon is not legally bound by the obligations introduced in the UN refugee convention. The refugees in Lebanon has been provided assistance by international organizations led

[117] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 13.

[118] Niall McCarthy, "Lebanon Has By Far The Most Refugees Per 1,000 Population" *Statistica*, June 19, 2019, accessed 12. Feb 2020, https://www.statista.com/chart/8800/lebanon-has-by-far-the-most-refugees-per-capita/ .

[119] Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response,".

by UNHCR and UNRWA. To provide the main elements of refugee protection, Lebanon relies only on the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with UNHCR.[120] However, signing a MoU with a limited scope is certainly not enough in the context of responding to the challenges of massive numbers displaced as faced by Lebanon. For example, the 2003 MoU signed by and between Lebanon and UNHCR does not cover important principles like "non-refoulment".[121] Furthermore, because of Lebanon's social, economic, and demographic circumstances as well as the presence of Palestinian refugees, the MoU clearly states that Lebanon does not consider itself an asylum country and it specifies that the term 'asylum seeker' should be applied. Thus, the MoU is far from providing sufficient guarantees for the protection of refugees. Such instruments are primarily intended to transfer refugee protection responsibilities from host states to UNHCR, in a move Michael Kagan calls a 'state-to-UN responsibility shift'.[121]

2.4.2 Lebanon's Domestic Legislation regarding Refugees

The Lebanese government not only rejects the international refugee law and insists on not accepting itself as a country of asylum,[122] but also refrained from adopting domestic legislation regarding the matter. While Lebanon is dealing with the largest influx of Syrian refugees, its legal frameworks for refugee governance exhibit a long-standing ambiguous approach.[123] It has failed to provide national mechanisms

[120] Ribale Sleiman-Haidar, "Relations between UNHCR and Arab Governments: Memoranda of Understanding in Lebanon and Jordan," *Middle East Centre,* September 23, 2016, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2016/09/23/relations-between-unhcr-and-arab-governments-memoranda-of-understanding-in-lebanon-and-jordan/.

[121] Ribale Sleiman Haidar, "The Long-Term Challenges of Forced Migration," *LSE Middle East Centre Collected Papers,* Vol. 6 (September 2016): 38.

[122] Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response," .

[123] Maha Yahya, "Policy Framework for Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 16, 2018, https://carnegie-mec.org/2018/04/16/policy-framework-for-refugees-%20in-lebanon-and-jordan-pub-76058 .

for refugee protection. Currently, it does not have any law that recognizes the status of refugees, or a national framework to serve as the refugee regime and to protect the refugees.[124]

Lebanon has responded to the Syrian refugee crisis in an informal manner, as institutional ambiguity is a form of governance that emerges from the constantly evolving interaction between formal and informal forms of regulation.[125] The governance of refugees has been left to different authorities, including international organizations or local governmental authorities like municipalities, governorates,[122] and local branches of justice administration offices.[126] In this environment, both state and non-state actors have implemented inconsistent practices with no solid legal basis.

Municipal authorities imposed arbitrary restrictions on the mobility of Syrians while local actors such as landlords and security guards regulated refugee areas and access to services.[127] Higher level security agencies issued illegal deportation orders. General security offices have applied varying procedures in processing the residence permits of Syrians.[128] The room for self-governance afforded to local authorities has only furthered the fragmented regime imposing inconsistent treatment of Syrians in the hands of different authorities.[129] Furthermore, under government policies that centered on the prohibition of formal refugee camps and restrictive regulations regarding registration, residence, and employment, the refugees were driven into informality and even illegality.[130] To meet their basic needs, many families resort to

[124] Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response,".

[125] Nassar Adid, "In his Machiavellian Designs, Bassil is Using Racist Discourse" *The Arab Weekly*, 16 June 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/his-machiavellian-designs-bassil-using-racist-discourse .

[126] Diogini, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon," 27.

[127] Diogini, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon," 30.

[128] Fakhoury "Refugee return and fragmented governance in the host state,".

[129] Diogini, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon," 30.

[130] Nassar, Adid, "In his Machiavellian Designs, Bassil is Using Racist Discourse" .

child marriage, child labor, and unfavorable coping methods as well. To sum up, it could be said that the Lebanese approach is laden with many –often intentional– gaps in terms of providing protection to refugees, and is unable, in a sense, to regulate refugee policy on its own.[131]

2.4.3 Responses to Syrian Refugees

2.4.3.1. Open Door Policy (2011-2014)

Lebanon has not followed a clear and well-defined policy for Syrian refugees.[135] The Lebanese government's approach to the refugee flow initially can be described as inaction, as the country had no strong legal framework and institutional body to deal with the incoming Syrian refugees.[132] There was not a consistent common framework regulating the refugee policies. At the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Lebanon followed an open-door policy, which paved the way for 1.5 million Syrians to enter the country.[133] This was based on the bilateral agreements between Syria and Lebanon in 1991 and 1993 that grant freedom of movement, residence, and property ownership between the two states. There were no attempts to control the border neither to regulate the reception nor the protection fields. The government did not invest but restricted some integration polices based on their previous experience with Palestinian refugees. The Lebanese government also was not keen on registering the incoming Syrian refugees, since the refugees were expected to stay only for a limited period.

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[131] Michael Kagan, "We Live in a Country of UNHCR' the UN Surrogate State and Refugee Policy in the Middle East" *UNHRC*, February, 2011, https://www.unhcr.org/4d5a8cde9.pdf.

[132] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 142.

[133] Carmen Geha and Joumana Talhouk, "Politics and the Plight of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Political Brief on the Return of Syrian Refugees" *Political Brief on the Return of Syrian Refugees American University of Beirut*, August, 2018, https://www.aub.edu.lb/Documents/Politics-and-the-Plight-of-Syrian-Refugees-in-Lebanon.pdf.

Hence, the Syrians in Lebanon were referred to as 'displaced' persons ('nazeh') instead of 'refugees'.[134] In addition, in July 2012, Lebanon adopted the Baabda Declaration of Disassociation policy, which ruled out any intervention in the conflict in any way, and aimed to prevent the spillover of the conflict to Lebanon. Since Lebanon already had a very fragile political environment marked by divisions among political groups which could be inclined to taking sides in the conflict. The responsibility of the refugees was also shifted to international and humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR.[135] Thus, initially Lebanon's response to the influx of Syrians can be described as passive, marked by the lack of necessary planned steps for policies to handle refugee influx.[136] Actually, defining the response of Lebanese government as 'policy of no-policy'[137] was to the point.

2.4.3.2. Refugee Policy Evolution: From Open Door to Restrictive Policies

As described above, Lebanon tried to remain outside of the Syrian conflict by following the disassociation policy, all the while hosting the Syrian refugees with its passive open-door policy. On the other hand, the inherent lines of division shaping Lebanese politics, dividing the country into two political camps –the pro-Syrian regime March 8 bloc, and the anti-Syrian regime March 14 bloc– made it difficult for Lebanon to follow this disassociation policy,[138] aand led to the imposition of

[134] "Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-16", UNDP, December 18, 2014, https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/regional-refugee-resilience-plan-2015-16-lebanon.

[135] Mencütek, Refugee *Governance*, 143.

[136] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan" .

[137] Karim El Mufti, "Official Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon, the Disastrous Policy of No-Policy," *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, January 10, 2014, https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/official-response-syrian-refugee-crisis-lebanon-disastrous-policy-no-policy.

[138] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, xiv.

restrictions to Syrian refugees. As Hezbollah, which leads the March 8 camp, supported the Syrian regime while the Sunni-led Future Party provided overt support to the Syrian opposition, the spillover of the Syrian crisis to Lebanon had become inevitable.[139] As early as August 2014, the Lebanese-Syrian became the scene of clashes involving Salafi-jihadist organizations, the Islamic State (IS) and al-Nusra front. These organizations attacked Arsal, a town near the border, killed some civilians and abducted more than 30 soldiers and policemen. With the involvement of Hezbollah's militias instead of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in Arsal in the endeavor to protect and defend the Lebanese borders, the disassociation policy was effectively dead in Lebanon.[140] Thereafter, by siding and aligning openly with the Syrian president Bashar Al-Asad,[141] Hezbollah changed the policy of inaction and refraining from intervention in the Syrian conflict.

President Michel Suleiman's attempt to bring the major Lebanese political parties together in a bid to continuing on the lines of the Baabda Declaration of Disassociation was unfruitful. The violent acts resumed, such as in Tripoli (Sunni majority) where there were bombings and fights between Bab al Tabbaneh (Salafists) and Jabal Muhsin (Alawite) and there were bombings in Shi'a town of al- Dahiye. The continuous acts of violence led to the failure of the President's attempts.[142] After the collapse of the disassociation policy, every political leader started to interpret the presence of the refugees differently, and the open-door policy started to change more obviously with the introduction of restrictive policies towards the refugees. In addition, in the context of Lebanese political system based on the representation of sectarian

[139] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 3.

[140] "Arsal Conflict", Lebanon Support Civil Society Knowledge Centre, last updated December 2017, https://civilsociety-centre.org/timelines/27778#event-a-href-sir-clashes-between-army-and-militants-arsalclashes-between-army-and-militants-in-arsal-a.

[141] Maktabi, Reema, "Hezbollah militia has taken over army's role at border, alleges Sami Gemayel" *Al-Arabiya*, 03 May 2019, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2019/05/04/Hezbollah-militia-has-taken-over-army-s-role-at-border-alleges-Sami-Gemayel.html.

[142] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 5.

groups, the Syrian refugee crisis came to be perceived as a threat to the already fragile demographic balance in the country.[143] Besides the failure of the disassociation policy, the political instability and socio-economic crisis in Lebanon also contributed to the call for restrictive policies.

The replacement of the open-door policy with the restrictive measures on refugee governance was an evolution shaped by a range of different dynamics. The unexpected expansion of refugee numbers imposed a heavy burden on Lebanon, crushing its social services and deteriorating its social stability.[144] The chronic political and socio-economic problems and the exponential increase in refugee numbers forced Lebanon to adopt a new strategy as necessitated by its corrupted political system, corrupted economy, and corrupted public services. The lack of adequate infrastructure and the inability to manage public goods needed by the rising numbers of refugees forced the Lebanese government to a rather restrictive approach towards the displaced Syrians.

To sum up the factors which contributed to bringing about the restrictive policies are the fragile demographic structure of Lebanon as a state based on sectarian balances, the failure of the disassociation policy that led political leaders from various parts of the political spectrum to interpreting the refugee regime in different ways, and the worries of repeating the previous harsh experiences with the burden of the Palestinian refugees.

2.4.3.3. Crisis Cell by the Lebanese Government

After a long period of indecision and deadlock, in May 2014, due to the deterioration of security, the government started working on a Crisis Cell. The result was the 'October Policy' introduced in October 2014. The restrictive regulations that

[143] Murat Tinas, "Syrians in Lebanon from the perspectives of the Lebanese government and Lebanese Society," *Turkish Journal Of Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 7, Issue 2, (2020), 19.

[144] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon,* 34.

followed since October 2014 include border controls, imposition of various restrictions on free movement, residence and work, and the introduction of incentives for repatriation. As a whole, the policy aimed to reduce the number Syrians moving to Lebanon, except those who are facing significant risk calling for humanitarian assistance. Other aims included to encourage and facilitate the return of Syrian refugees, to enforce municipality security measures, to bar the Syrians from working illegally,[145] and to take various initiatives on international platforms in order to relieve the burden on the country, in the form of financial support where possible.[146]

The General Directorate of General Security (GDGS), responsible for dealing with the issues of the foreigners in the country, was given the task of implementing the policy.[147] The GDGS, which is alleged to be close to Hezbollah, has actively implemented the measures necessary to limit the entry of mostly Sunni refugees into Lebanon, and to encourage their repatriation.[148] These restrictions have clearly reduced the flow of Syrians and made it more difficult and costly for Syrians to remain in Lebanon. In addition to tighter border controls, both the registered and unregistered Syrians in the country were required to pay an annual fee of 200 dollars for residency renewals. This measure forced most Syrians to abandoning legal residence in the country and, instead, to remaining on an illegal basis.[149] According to UNHCR, approximately 70% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon lack legal residence permits due to the measures implemented.[150]

The October Policy promoted the administrative division to subnational variation at municipal level.[150] This policy allowed each municipality to deal with the

[145] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis" .

[146] Tınas, "Syrians in Lebanon," 23.

[147] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis," .

[148] Tınas, "Syrians in Lebanon," .

[149] Fakhoury "Refugee return and fragmented governance,".

[150] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis," 18.

refugees in a way that would suits the local political economy, which led to uneven implementation of the restrictions country-wide. For instance, some municipalities imposed a curfew at night for the refugees while other municipalities were more lenient. The differences between the newly imposed laws by the municipalities led to a significant degree of decentralization in policy implementation. Such decentralization is attributed to the absence of unified central government and the role of confessionalism.[151] Consequently, the Syrians have been pushed to rather vulnerable situations due to these measures. As a result, they continue to live in trying conditions due to inadequate housing, not to mention the security concerns and the restrictive policies introduced by the Lebanese government.[152]

Other efforts under the umbrella of the Crisis Cell included reaching out to the international community for support regarding the refugees and the burden incurred by the host country. Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was introduced as part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience plan (3RP) announced in Berlin in December of 2014.[153] Yet another pillar was the Lebanon Compact announced in London in February 2016, providing employment and education opportunities for not only the vulnerable Syrians, but also for the vulnerable elements of the Lebanese society. In response to the compact supported by the EU, the Lebanese government accepted to grant Syrian refugees temporary stay, in return for an aid of EUR 400m. Still, Lebanon continued to impose residency restrictions for Syrians, despite the efforts by the EU.[154]

Another attempt that increased the Lebanese government's control over the refugee scene is the 2017-2020 LCRP, in which the statement of 'measures aligned with international law and practice' is replaced with the phrase stating that Lebanon

[151] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis,"

[152] Tınas, "Syrians in Lebanon," 24.

[153] "Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-16", UNDP, published December 18, 2014, https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/regional-refugee-resilience-plan-2015-16-lebanon.

[154] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis," 16.

'reserves its sovereign right to determine [temporarily displaced Syrians'] status according to Lebanese laws and regulations'.[155]

2.4.4 The Legal Status and Rights of the Syrians in Lebanon

Refugees in Lebanon are vulnerable as they lack rights granted to refugees. This matter became one of the controversial issues in Lebanon, as the country does not consider the Syrians to be 'refugees'[156] effectively depriving them of their basic rights. According to the United Nations refugee's convention article 1A (2), a refugee is any person that was displaced from his own country and might be subjected to mistreatment due to his race, religion, nationality, or political party, and who cannot afford protection for himself/herself in his/her own country, in the face of such mistreatment.[157] However, Lebanon still refuses to grant refugee status or residency rights to Syrians, keeping them under pressure for repatriation. As the Lebanese government's policies in response to the Syrian refugee presence are focused on the short term, since the government projects only a temporary stay within the country for the refugees, no provision for any local integration is provided either.[158] Lebanon relies on the fact that it is one of the countries that has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Additional Protocol establishing the

[155] Maja Janmyr, "UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: negotiating status and registration in Lebanon", *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Volume 22, Issue 3, (2018): 397

[156] Joyce Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'" *The National World*, September 25, 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/world/gebran-bassil-lebanon-does-not-accept-syrians-as-refugees-1.773658.

[157] "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees" UNHCR, accessed February 15, 2022, https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/55726/Convention+relating+to+the+Status+of+refugees+%28signed+28+July+1951%2C+entered+into+force+22+April+1954%29+189+UNTS+150+and+Protocol+relating+to+the+Status+of+Refugees+%28signed+31+January+1967%2C+entered+into+force+4+October+1967%29+606+UNTS+267/0bf3248a-cfa8-4a60-864d-65cdfece1d47.

[158] Isil, "A Comparatıve Study Of Turkey, Lebanon And Jordan," 20.

basic rights of refugees.[159] Thus, the country's refrain from ratification of the international refugee law permits not to be bound by international rules and requirements. The only piece of regulation that can have legal effect in terms of defining the status of refugees and controlling their process in Lebanon is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2003 between Lebanese government and UNHCR.[160] From a political point of view, the country does not consider itself an asylum country, but only a transit one, given the unsteady sectarian balance shaping its political dynamics.[161] The result is the classification of all Syrians in Lebanon as 'displaced' individuals, rather than refugees.[162]

2.4.5 The Socio-Economic Conditions and the Main Problem of Syrians in Lebanon

Although it has been more than a decade since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict and the associated inevitable mass refugee flows, the situation of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon remains precarious. The lack of a clear policy regarding the refugees and the restrictive measures introduced as part of the refugee regime in Lebanon after the collapse of the disassociation policy and the unexpected increase in the number of refugees, have exacerbated the conditions for Syrians. The refugees in Lebanon live in a challenging environment since the country has limited resources and infrastructure, and the government's refugee policies bring about only an inadequate

[159] Lorenza Errighi and Jörn Griesse, "The Syrian refugee crisis: Labour market implications in Jordan and Lebanon" *European Commission*, July 6, 2016, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/878f00db-4405-11e6-9c64-01aa75ed71a1/language-en.

[160] "Regional Office in Lebanon, Country Operations Plan 1." UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/3fd9c6a14.pdf .

[161] "Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-16", UNDP, https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/regional-refugee-resilience-plan-2015-16-lebanon.

[162] Yahya, "Policy Framework for Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan,".

response to refugee waves.[163] In the light of potential as well as actual opposition on part of some Lebanese communities, the government rejects calls for integration as well.[164] For instance, Lebanon refused to employ the encampment policy, and there are no refugee camps for the displaced Syrians. The Lebanese government did not allow the Syrians to settle in specific camps as part of its efforts to avoid what had happened with the Palestinians. For this reason, some of the Syrians had to settle in the suburbs while others settled in informal settlements.[165] Data available confirms that the majority of Syrian refugees live in the poorest districts of Lebanon, with 25% of Lebanese population already living below the local poverty line of 4 dollars.[166] This situation made the already difficult living conditions of the locals in these areas, and the circumstances the refugees face as they struggled to meet their basic needs, even worse.[167] As a result, the primary problems faced by the Syrians in the country are about access to basic human needs and to public services in Lebanon. The restrictive policies of Lebanon led to discriminative attitudes against the Syrians in terms of access to primary needs such as accommodation healthcare, socioeconomic needs such as employment, not to mention educational opportunities and protection.

The Syrians' life in Lebanon has become unbearable due to difficult living conditions. As the fragile economy of Lebanon was also affected by the Syrian influx, the Lebanese authorities restricted Syrians' access to certain facilities in any productive endeavor they may attempt.[168] This left a big portion of the Syrians incapable of meeting their basic needs, as the percentage of the Syrians that live below

[163] Shawaf, and El Asmar, "'We're not There Yet…' Voices of refugees from Syria in Lebanon".

[165] Errighi and Jörn Griesse, "The Syrian refugee crisis: Labour market implications in Jordan and Lebanon".

[166] Diogini, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon," 27.

[167] Tinas, "Syrians in Lebanon," 25.

[168] Errighi and Jörn Griesse, "The Syrian refugee crisis," 11.

the poverty line has increased drastically over the years.[169] Furthermore, preventing Syrian refugees from working legally led to an increase in unregistered employment as well. As a result, the refugees have been living in a highly vulnerable state, depending mostly on humanitarian aids to survive.[170]

In addition, the Lebanese government has also diminished the rights and restricted the international assistance for the refugees.[171] Besides these measures, in May 2015 the government of Lebanon suspended the Syrian registrations by the UNHCR office.[172] Furthermore, the tensions between UNHCR and the Lebanese foreign ministry grew over time. The Lebanese foreign ministry alleged that the UNCHR has been discouraging the return of the refugees while the UNHCR denied the accusation by saying that they are performing a global mandate which aims to provide help and assistance to the refugees according to international standards.[173] A foreign ministry official, Ghadi Al Khoury, claimed that most regions in Syria were safe. He alleged that UNCHR has been telling the refugees to not to return. The ministry also took a decision to suspend the residency applications for UNHCR staff in Lebanon.[174]

Access to education services is another major challenge for the Syrians in Lebanon, given the fact that the majority of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are children and teenagers.[175] Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are deprived of

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[169] "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2019" UNHCR, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73118.pdf.

[170] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 130.

[171] Will Todman, "Supporting Syrian Refugees amidst Lebanon's Crises," *GCSP Publication*, April 2021, https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/supporting-syrian-refugees-amidst-lebanons-crises.

[172] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance*, 129.

[173] "Tensions between Lebanon and UNHCR over Syrian refugees" Al Jazeera English, Youtube video, June 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrBWo0BhbwE .

[174] Al Jazeera English, "Tensions between Lebanon and UNHCR" .

[175] Pelayo, "The EU-Lebanon's Multilateral Refugee Governance," 39-43.

educational opportunities, as nearly half of the school-age children cannot benefit from formal education.[176] Furthermore, there have also been reports indicating that most Syrian children who get education do not attend classes on a regular basis nonetheless, primarily due to the worsening economic situation of their families, who usually send their children to work instead of school.[177] According to Tinas, the failure to provide regular education for refugee children will create profound challenges in the long term.[178]

On the healthcare front, one should note that Syrians in Lebanon do not have access to affordable healthcare, resulting in a lack of health security. They have been forced to pay the same amounts paid by Lebanese citizens, for public health services.[179] The costs above their means, and the limited access to healthcare services have posed serious challenges to vulnerable Syrians, and left many of them in dire conditions.

2.4.6. Hostility against the Syrian Refugees

Being displaced and being a refugee brings many challenges along. Syrian refugees in neighboring countries in general and Lebanon in particular are facing heavy discrimination in addition to the difficulties they endure in terms of living conditions. Even though the Lebanese government initially followed an open-door policy as the Syrians were welcome and considered temporary guests,[180] by the time

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[176] Pelayo, "The EU-Lebanon's Multilateral Refugee Governance," 39-43.

[177] Manar Fleifel, "Displaced Syrians in Lebanon: Beyond Categorization and Homogeneity of Experiences" *Active Arap Voice*, March 2, 20019, www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/war_economy_-_v.1.2-digital.pdf .

[178] Tinas, "Syrian Refugees in Lebanon." 5.

[179] Mencütek, *Refugee Governance,* 153.

[180] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

this situation has changed. As a result, many high-ranking officials, interpreting the refugee governance according to their own attitudes and interests as described above, has been mostly asking for the refugees' return to their assumed 'safe zones' in Syria, in coordination with the Syrian government.[181] These attributes by the Lebanese authorities make the life of the Syrians difficult, exposing them to various challenges. The following sections will provide examples of such attitudes.

The country's uncommitted position with regards to refugee law and its inadequate response put refugees in a challenging environment. Hence, Lebanon is often characterized by its ineffective and severe policies towards the refugees. To boot, lacking a clear refugee policy is arguably one of the worst-case refugee policies Lebanon could have opted for. As its refugee policy evolved, to an extent, to xenophobia, exhibiting discriminatory characteristics as it came to be implemented by political leaders mostly in view of their personal attitudes and political stance. The principles of anti-racism, and the concept of safety and humanitarian protection that should be the fundamental to formulating the refugee policies are absent in Lebanon. The refugees have been shown as they are not just another presence of individuals, but that they have demands on them, they may lower their wealth they might also take their jobs away.

The protection of refugees is threatened by the harsh policies and subnational variations in such policies, which bring Lebanon also to a position in conflict with the responsibility to provide the required protection for refugees. By leaving the refugee governance mostly to the subnational actors, different negative discourses about the refugees tend to affect refugees' chances in life, and disregard the fundamental commitment to refugee protection. "The essential elements of international protection" as understood by UNHCR, are currently more important than ever, since the number of people in need of protection is growing by thousands.

The principal elements of universal protections include the admission of refugees to safety, immunity against forcible repatriation, equality and assistance in surviving. These should be provided by the international community as the number of

[181] Shawaf and El Asmar, "'We're not There Yet…' Voices of refugees from Syria in Lebanon".

the people in need of protection is increasing. The main reason that people seek displacement within or from Syria is the concern for safety, while in Lebanon the expectations for safety were not met. According to a survey by OXFAM, only 21% of the respondents confirmed feeling safe in Lebanon. On the other hand, 61% stated that they have partly lost their sense of safety, and 15% responded saying that they completely lost the sense of safety.[182]

Overall, the response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon initially has been lacking solid and national governance strategies, and was marked by insufficient capacities. Mainly the international organizations, international non-governmental organizations and humanitarian agencies guided the assistance afforded to the refugees. In addition, because of the inability and the deficiency of the Lebanese government in taking and implementing common and national decisions and actions in response to the initial refugee influx, at some point the refugee governance in Lebanon has been left substantially to subnational actors like municipalities and governorates.[183] The lack of international and regional frameworks for addressing this crisis, and the refusal of Lebanon to apply international refugee law, not to mention the inadequacy of its domestic legislation on refugees, create substantial shortcomings in terms of guaranteeing the protection of refugees in Lebanon. It could be argued that the interests and ideologies of political parties play important roles in determining the policies in Lebanon. It goes without saying that political interests and ideology determine the actions of political leaders. In this respect, the refugee policy has been shaped by the political interests of different political groups. Instead of implementing a national inclusive policy for refugees, Lebanon has followed a fragmented policy path. Against this background, the next chapter will explore the response of Lebanon to the mass refugee flow in accordance with its political structure and its relations with Syria, with a specific focus on its political leaders' discourses regarding the Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

[182] Shawaf, and El Asmar, "'We're not There Yet…' Voices of refugees from Syria in Lebanon",.

[183] Mencütek, Refugee *Governance,* 131.

CHAPTER 3

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PART 1

The protracted Syrian refugee crisis has triggered a substantial amount of political discourse about the refugees, who continue to be framed in a wide variety of ways in political rhetoric and public discourse. The Syrian refugee influx has been the hot topic to be discussed by politicians in public, with the aim of providing a strategy on how to respond to the refugee flows and ensuring the citizens' safety and the country's security, in the face of increasing numbers of refugees. Numerous political actors and leaders have been voicing different opinions on how to assist the displaced Syrian people. While some of them have showed empathy towards the refugees, the others were rather pessimistic and had negative attitudes about their presence.

In Lebanon, besides the fragmented political landscape, instability, and economic uncertainty, the lack of an official refugee policy is obvious. As the number of the refugees escalated over the years, the political discourse of Lebanese politicians framing the Syrian refugees became increasingly salient. Consequently, the refugee regime in general and the Syrian refugee regime in particular became complicated topic of debate in Lebanon, as Lebanese political leaders have started to interpret this issue based on their own points of view and political standings. It could be argued that the lack of an official refugee regime has been politicized and exploited by politicians and members of the two political camps for political purposes, in an already fragmented political atmosphere.

Given the sectarian design of the political system and the polarized environment among the Lebanese political actors regarding the relations with Syria and its role in Lebanon, the presence of Syrian refugees is highly politicized in Lebanon.[184] The competing interests among the Lebanese political blocks (8 March/14 March) make it harder to reach a consensus in governing the refugee crisis. The

[184] Geha and Talhouk, "Politics and the Plight of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon,"

competing interests among the Lebanese political blocs (March 8/March 14) make it harder to reach a consensus in handling the refugee crisis. The governance and status of Syrian refugees struggled between free Patriotic movement and Hezbollah who consider the Assad regime as an ally and Future Movement and Progressive Socialist Party who are against the Assad regime.[185] In this respect, the behavior adopted by the two competing camps towards the refugees is connected with their overall attitudes towards the Syrian regime.[186]

The notion of leadership (Za'ama) deeply connected with the sectarian based political system in Lebanon plays a pivotal role in the social and political sphere, with a subsequent effect on the politicization of the public space.[187] .[188] In this context, it is important to investigate the role of the leaders. Discourse analysis is thus central to any inquiry of the relationship between the political leaders' rhetoric and the response towards the refugees in Lebanon. The leading political figures whose effect on the society and the politics of Lebanon within the March 8 and March 14 blocs are Gebran Bassil, Saad Hariri, Hassan Nasrallah and Walid Jumblatt. Therefore, the pages to come will analyze the political discourses of these four Lebanese political leaders. Such an analysis is especially important as significant changes occurred with the governance of refugees after the 2014 October Policy,[189] which left considerable room for interpretation for political figures. The choice of the four political leaders is mostly shaped by their different critical views on the Syrian refugee influx. They are also esteemed politicians who effectively made politics their careers, and who play

[185] Talhouk, "Politics and the Plight," 4.

[186] Talhouk, "Politics and the Plight," 52.

[187] Bruno Lefort, "Michel Aoun, 'Patriarch of the Christian Street': Leadership, Affect, and the Politics of Communalization in Lebanon," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 102–23, https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-00801007.

[188] Lefort, "Michel Aoun, 'Patriarch of the Christian Street': Leadership, Affect, and the Politics of Communalization in Lebanon,"

[189] Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis,".

important roles on the national level. As they are the politicians with the widest following in the country, they also have the ability to influence the public opinion in their own community.

The politicians' political leanings and individual backgrounds induced different perspectives on the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. While some political leaders have spoken in favor of hosting and helping the refugees, others were completely against hosting them. This study will therefore try to analyze and explain the reasons behind their perspectives, and how their points of view affected the implementation and governance of refugee policies.

The following sections illustrate the stances of Gebran Bassil, Hassan Nasrallah, Saad Hariri, and Walid Jumblatt, and analyze their discourses regarding the Syrian refugees. Brief information about the formation and features of the political parties they are affiliated with will help explain their positions on the current issues. On the other hand, the political relations between the Syrian government and Lebanese political parties have been an important key factor in shaping the political environment.[190] Therefore, these relations will also provide keys to understanding Lebanese political parties' positions regarding the Syrian refugees. The following pages will present a summary of the relations the political parties four leaders covered by the study are affiliated with have with Syria in general and the Syrian regime in particular.

3.1 Gebran Bassil

The presence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon raised concerns among some segments of the Lebanese Christians, particularly the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). The country's experience with the Palestinian refugees, which became a vital political force, causing imbalance and tremors through the Lebanese sectarian based political

[190] Jeremy Jones, *Negotiating Change: The New Politics of Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 88.

system, was not something FPM intended to repeat.[191] A major political figure known by his objection to the presence of Syrians in Lebanon since the beginning of Syrian influx into Lebanon, and by his explicit discriminative attitudes ranging to xenophobic rhetoric and hate speech against the Syrian refugees is Gebran Bassil. He was one of the first names to warn that the presence of refugees within Lebanon would threaten Lebanon's existence, and to insist that Lebanon should not accept Syrian refugees with the exception of those in need for urgent medical care.[192]

Gebran Bassil served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants between the years 2014 and 2020. He is also the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement since 2015, a seat that he took over when his father-in-law Michel Aoun became the president of Lebanon.[193] This section will provide brief information about Gebran Bassil's political party, before moving on to the analysis of his rhetoric and attitudes regarding the Syrian refugees.

The Free Patriotic Movement [*al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr*] is Lebanon's largest Christian political party in terms of representation in the National Assembly. The party is adamant in its references to Lebanese nationalism. Since 2006, it is also the strongest ally of Hezbollah.[194] It was officially found as a political party in 2005 by Michel Aoun,[195] who effectively transferred the party leadership to his son-in-law

[191] Kai Kverme, "The Refugee Factor: The Syrian crisis has revealed the far-reaching and fundamental disagreements among Lebanon's Christian parties" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 14, 2013, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/50946.

[192] Will Todman and Caleb Harper, "CSIS BRIEFS," accessed February 2, 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/211216_Todman_Lebanon_HumanitarianCrisis_0.pdf.

[193] "How Lebanon's President Michel Aoun Is Paving the Way for Son-In-Law Bassil," The National, December 29, 2020, https://www.thenationalnews.com/opinion/comment/how-lebanon-s-president-michel-aoun-is-paving-the-way-for-son-in-law-bassil-1.1136849.

[194] Kali Robinson, "What Is Hezbollah?," Council on Foreign Relations, September 1, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah.

[195] Lefort, "Michel Aoun, 'Patriarch of the Christian Street': Leadership, Affect, and the Politics of Communalization in Lebanon,"

Gebran Bassil in 2015. Michel Aoun's opposition to Syrian military presence in Lebanon dated back to the days of the Taif Accord in 1989, which officially put an end to the Lebanese civil war. In that accord, Syrian Forces were given the legitimate right to assist the Lebanese government and to regulate the functioning of its political system.[196] Subsequently, battle had been launched to terminate the Syrian hegemony in Lebanon by different actors including Aoun was frustrated. The "Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination Treaty"[197] signed in 1991 between Lebanon and Syria enabled the Syrian government to increase its pressure and to eliminate the provocative actions and protests.[198] As a result, Aoun under the pressure of Syrian led forces, he was forced to leave the country. He continued his anti-Syrian political efforts abroad, in France.[199] When the Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon after demonstrations chanting "Syria out!" in Lebanon following the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, Aoun returned to Lebanon. However, interestingly Aoun joined the March 8 pro-Syrian block and stood with Hezbollah –the only militia which kept its arms after the Taif Accords.[200] It considers that the Syrian regime preserves the rights of minorities, also supports the role of Hezbollah as it perceives its role as a defensive force in the face of the Israeli threats.[201] This attitude was formalized by the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Aoun and Hezbollah in 2006.

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[196] Shaery Roschanack, "The Local Politics of the Lebanese Disappeared," *Middle East Report,* (Spring 2012) . https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41702428.pdf

[197] "Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination Treaty between the Republic of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic", Syrian Lebanese Higher Council, February 2, 2022, http://www.syrleb.org/SD08/msf/1507751797_.pdf.

[198] Roschanack Shaery, "Lebanese Disappeared".

[199] "Michel Aoun | Biography, History, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed March 7, 2021, https://merip.org/2012/03/the-local-politics-of-the-lebanese-disappeared/.

[200] Özlem Tür, "The Lebanese War Of 2006: Reasons and Consequences" *Perceptions*, 12, No.1 (Spring 2007).

[201] Kai Kverme, "The Refugee Factor," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 14, 2013, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/50946.

Currently, in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis FPM is clearly against the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as it is concerned that the country can have a repeat of its experience with Palestinian refugees, which, in time, evolved into a vital force in the fragile sectarian political system of Lebanon.[202] Aoun had publicly voiced his view claiming "Syrian refugees are a serious danger" for Lebanon.[203] He alleged that the accumulation of refugees poses a danger for Lebanon, as these people who rose against the Syrian government can end up in a rebellion against Lebanon as well.[204] In addition, Aoun described the Syrian refugee crisis as one of the worst crises Lebanon faced since World War II, comparing it to the Covid-19 crisis. In one of his speeches, he argued that;

> The Secretary-General of the United Nations described the COVID-19 pandemic as the worst global crisis since World War II, and the displaced Syrian crisis had previously been described as the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. Today, Lebanon is gathering on its soil a greater burden and the two worst crises that have hit the world 75 years ago.[205]

At the time the influx of displaced Syrians to Lebanon began, Gebran Bassil was the Minister of Energy and Water (2009-2014). From the beginning of the conflict in Syria and the Syrian influx into Lebanon, Gebran Bassil took a position against Syrian refugees, and he started his rhetoric based on hate speech against them.[206] He consistently voiced his opposition to welcoming the Syrian refugees and hosting them

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[202] Kverme, "The Refugee Factor,".

[203] Bassem Chit, Mohamad Ali Nayel, "Understanding racism against Syrian refugees in Lebanon" *Civil Society Centre, Lebenon Support*, October 1, 2013, https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/understanding-racism-against-syrian-refugees-lebanon.

[204] "Aoun: Syrian refugees are a great danger", Saida Online, accessed September 1, 2021, https://www.saidaonline.com/newsapp.php?go=fullnews&newsid=51187

[205] "Aoun requests international support for Lebanon to overcome the severe economic collapse" Aljazeera, April 6, 2020 https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2020/4/6/لبنان-عون-الانهيار-كورونا-اللاجئين.

[206] Sulayman Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?" *Al Jazeera*, July 17, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.net/midan/intellect/sociology/2019/7/17/تغريدات-باسيل-العنصرية-هل-انتقلت-عدوى

in Lebanon. He has used negative descriptions about the refugees to convince the citizens that they pose a threat to them and to their countries. Ever since, he started to call for the deportation of displaced Syrians as well as the Palestinian refugees, stating that they "take the place of the Lebanese".[207] All along he referred to the burden posed by the Palestinian refugees, and stated that Lebanon does not want to take any other burden. He argued that this claim does not constitute racism at all, and thus should not be condemned. He considers such an attitude a natural patriotic one any Lebanese would be proud to embrace.[208] Over the years, his rhetoric reached a whole new level that had the potential to incite public anger against Syrian refugees. His statements at various conferences, meetings, interviews, and social media –Twitter in particular– became more and more fervent about this issue. He reached a point where he called the Syrians who entered Lebanon outside the legal channels as 'occupiers'[209] of Lebanese territories, and as "an existential threat" to the country. He alleged that, in his opinion, the only solution was to return them to their home nation.[210]

The following pages will be dedicated to an analysis of his discourse about the Syrian refugees, juxtaposing his speeches at the conferences, meetings and interviews, and investigating the statements he shared on his personal Twitter account. It is crucial to analyze his statements on Twitter, as that social media channel became a tool for political figures to express their views and announce their opinions and policies, as we are familiar with the concept of "Twitter Diplomacy". Gebran Bassil is one of the political figures who uses his Twitter account frequently to express his opinions. A study carried out by InfoTimes shows that Gebran Bassil played the most prominent and obvious role calling for the rejection of refugees, and providing support for the

[207] Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

[208] Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

[209] Orient Onair, "Gebran Bassil describes the refugees as occuppiers", Youtube video, October 11, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unej3L_1yZA

[210] Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

Syrian regime.[211] From the beginning of the Syrian conflict and the flow of the Syrians to Lebanon, he has started to express his negative point of view towards Syrians in his Twitter account. In his tweets, he often used statements entailing opposition to and hatred against Syrian refugees, demanding their repatriation (see Figure 4). Besides his overwhelmingly negative discourse regarding the Syrians, in December 2012 Gebran Bassil called the government to taking action to stop the entry of Syrians, arguing that Lebanon does not have the capability to host them. He also called for measures for repatriation, arguing that Lebanon could not carry the burden any more.[212]

[211] "Analysis of Tweets Showcases Hatred towards Syrian Refugees among Lebanon's Elite," InfoTimes, September 15, 2019, https://infotimes.org/analysis-of-tweets-showcases-hatred-among-lebanons-elite-towards-syrian-refugees/?fbclid=IwAR0hAfXrCjY19jVHz8JIp9kfLjamaJRl5YI2NuD13sILbvkulE1pNKahzDI. .

[212] "Bassil About the Syrian Refugees", MTV Lebanon, December 22, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_5aD3lbZ0s&app=desktop.

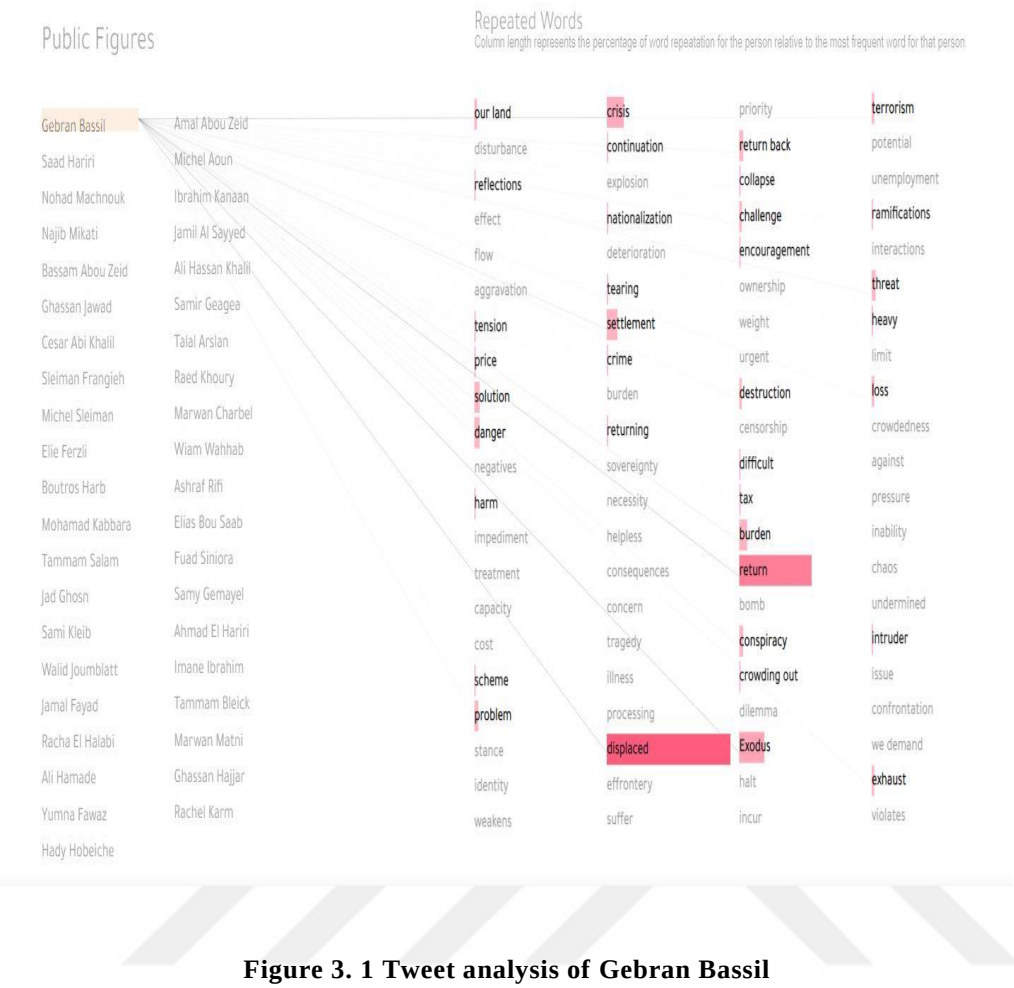


Figure 3. 1 Tweet analysis of Gebran Bassil

It is noteworthy that Gebran Bassil refrains from designating the Syrians as "refugees" in his speeches. He rather calls them "displaced [213], a word corresponding to "*Nazeh*" in the Arabic dialect spoken in Lebanon. . At the United Nations General Assembly meeting he attended, he stressed the necessity to refrain from calling the Syrians refugees by saying "Lebanon does not consider Syrians to be refugees, not one of them ".[214] His position of not extending them refugee status is mostly in connection with UN Convention of 1951, Relating to the Status of Refugees, which remains not ratified by Lebanon.[218] In the context of international law, the term refugee assigns

[213] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

[214] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

certain responsibilities to host states. By his insistence on denying the refugee label, Bassil wants to make sure that Lebanon is exempted from the commitments and responsibilities a signatory to the Convention would have towards the refugees.



Figure 3. 2 Gebran Bassil tweet[215]

Regarding the policy of refusal to set up camps for displaced Syrians, Bassil stated "What we resisted in 2011 –setting up camps for displaced Syrians– will not be allowed to happen again. There is only one way for the Syrians: returning to their homeland".[216] He tried to associate the Syrians' presence with the country's previous experience with Palestinian refugees, and put emphasis on the burden and threat that they can pose on the country. In his Twitter and Instagram accounts he shared an old photo of the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp from the 1960s, and called the

[215] Gebran Bassil, "The Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp from the 1960s, Lebanese! Do not accept any establishment of any camp" Instagram post, Aug 23, 2017, https://www.instagram.com/p/BYKn--Zgtck/?taken-by=gebranbassil.

[216] Gebran Bassil, "What we resisted in 2011 will not be allowed today to set up camps for the displaced Syrians" Twitter post, 07:52 pm, October 7, 2017, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/916934339207794688.

Lebanese to rejecting any establishment of any camp by using the hashtag 'to keep the country for ourselves'[217] (see figure 5).

It is possible to argue that, by associating the case of Syrian refugees with that of Palestinians, he engaged in a prevocational rhetoric arising out of the implicit assumption that the Syrians will too be a threat for the Christians, tilting the fragile demographic and sectarian balance in the country.

His attitude verging on panic about demographics manifested itself in many of his speeches. With reference to the general assumption held by Christians in general and Maronites in particular that the Palestinian refugees caused the civil war in the 1970s,[218] he stated that "The experience of the Palestinian refugee will not be repeated with the Syrian displaced person, who has been prevented from returning so far from several parties due to several factors."[219]

He has also tried to spread fear among the Lebanese citizens that the "Syrian displaced crisis" will be permanent, and that the Lebanese will suffer from their burden politically and economically, as it happened with the Palestinian case. In addition, he insisted in his ultranationalist comments about Syrians by claiming that "This land that yielded prophets and saints will not replace its people neither with refugees, displaced persons, or corrupted people."[222] Evidently, his arguments are based on the fears of people, especially his followers, who are concerned that Syrians would take their jobs, can bring about another civil war, shift the demographic balance even more against the Christians, and pose a threat against Lebanese nationalism. His exaggerated references to the burden of Syrian refugees continued with flaming the demography-

[217] Ayoub, and Jaoude, "Refugees in Lebanon Are Still Being Scapegoated in the Media and in Academia", *Global Voices,* December 14, 2017, https://globalvoices.org/2017/12/14/refugees-in-lebanon-are-still-being-scapegoated-in-the-media-and-in-academia/

[218] Michael C. Hudson, "The Plaestinian Factor in Lebanese Civil War*", Middle East Journal*, Vol.32, No.3 (Summer,1978): 277 .

[219] Gebran Bassil, "The experience of the Palestinian refugee will not be repeated with the Syrian displaced person" Twitter post, 07:27 p.m., Jun 14, 2019, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/1139796594084200448.

related phobia deep-rooted in Lebanese society.[220] The fear of disturbance of the demographic and religious balance of powers was the main concern of Bassil as his rhetoric is frequently fueled with demographic concerns.

In the Lebanese Diaspora Conference, Gebran Bassil again criticized the presence of refugees in Lebanon by saying that,

> We will not let you (Lebanese citizens) and our country to be the dream of an alternative homeland for others. Rather, we want it to remain our dream by returning to it, so the Palestinian does not replace the son of the south, and the Syrian does not replace the son of Bekaa and Akkar.[221]

It seems that he has been trying to provoke even the Lebanese abroad against the Syrians by telling them that the Syrians are spreading over the Lebanese territory, and they should not allow the displaced to replace Lebanese on their land, where they –not the 'displaced foreigners'– hold the birthright to live".

Gebran Bassil continued his negative discourse against the refugees even though he has been criticized by various humanitarian advocates for engaging in discriminative, xenophobic, and racist acts. Although humanitarian advocates in Lebanon criticized Gebran Bassil for his aggressive discourses against Syrians in Lebanon, he continued taking a discriminative position against the refugees and did not stop his racist discourse. He proceeded to accuse these advocates with not respecting Lebanese identity and not being strong patriots.

He also embraced a distinction of 'us versus them' in the Lebanese context, and accused the others with not having strong Lebanese affiliation. Doing so he was probably targeting the groups whose sectarian identity was stronger than their national identity. After receiving a range of criticisms from some the segments of the society, he continued to defend his ideas by saying;

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[220] Karim El Mufti, "Official Response to the Syrian refugee Crisis in Lebanon, the Disastrous Policy of No-Policy*" Civil Society Knowledge Center,* January, 1, 2014, https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/official-response-syrian-refugee-crisis-lebanon-disastrous-policy-no-policy

[221] Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

> "Of course, we want to distinguish the Lebanese citizen from the non-Lebanese, by work, housing, tax and many things, and this is not racial discrimination but rather the sovereignty of the state over its land. Some accuse me of being racist and I understand, because the Lebanese affiliation with these people is not strong enough to feel what we feel, and because they consider that there is a second affiliation which may be more important to them."[222]

As he denied the any racism in his comments, he did not refrain again from associating the attitudes towards the refugees with the sectarian affiliation. He consistently implied in his speeches that some political elites do not share the idea of Lebanese unity as his followers do, and instead tolerate the presence of Syrian refugees in the country since those political elites prioritize their Muslim (Sunni) identity over their Lebanese identity, given the fact that the majority of Syrians are of Sunni faith.

However, when he was addressing the need for the repatriation of the Syrians, he did not hesitate to describe the refugees as "an existential threat" by arguing that the political system of Lebanon requires a balance for the representation and the interests of existing sect-based groups.[223] Moreover, he also described the danger posed by the influx of Sunni Syrians into the political system of Lebanon by arguing that "It is stipulated in our constitution; it is related to the existence of the country that's based on a certain equilibrium and balance; you cannot all of a sudden introduce groups equal to 50 percent of its population, to the country."[224]

On the other hand, Gebran Bassil was also trying to attract and include all the segments of the society in his campaign against the Syrian refugees. His statement at the meeting of the municipalities should be read in this context: "Our deal with the displaced people is humane and brotherly, and our approach is humane and patriotic rather than sectarian, because all sects and all Lebanese citizens have suffered".[225] It could be argued that Gebran Bassil tried to reach various segments of the society as he

[222] Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

[223] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

[224] Karima," Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

[225] Karima, "Bassil's racist tweets: Did Marine Le Pen's infection spread to Lebanon?"

needed the backing of the public opinion to achieve his goal of the repatriation of Syrians.

Even though sometimes he took time to claim that his claims are not sectarian, his references to the sectarian aspect of the Lebanese society were common. Gebran Bassil at times looked contradictory, as he supported his views with the fact that Lebanon has a sect-based political order that is unable to accept more refugees from other religious groups. At other times, however, he chose to base his claims on the threats posed by the Syrian refugees, for the Lebanese society as a whole, citizens as the refugee flow affects the Lebanese economy and national entity. His arguments focused on attempting to attract all segments of the society to protesting the existence of the refugees in Lebanon by depicting it as a threat to the entire Lebanese nation and society. It could be argued that, as much as he is trying to show that his rhetoric about the refugees is for the wellness of the nation and the whole society, there is a reality of trying to hide his real political opinion by such allegations, comparable in a tactical sense to the tracks of discourse taken by the other politicians covered in this study.

Gebran Bassil is noteworthy for not only his rhetoric, but also his leadership in various campaigns against the refugees.[226] His speeches were often followed by significant protests organized in front of Syrian food shops and stores that employed Syrians by demonstrating and chanting for the repatriation of Syrians. Gebran Bassil's party, the Free Patriotic Movement, obviously took the lead in these events.[227] Furthermore, led by Bassil, the Free Patriotic Movement launched a campaign against the refugees under the slogan "If you love Lebanon hire a Lebanese".[228] This campaign gave birth to a witch-hunt for the Syrian refugees and protests against their employment, calling employers to firing Syrian workers and hiring Lebanese ones to replace them.[229] Moreover, the FPM organized a movement through its youth wing,

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[227] "Demonstration against Syrians in Lebanon... Bassil: We will not allow them to stay"Al Jazeera, June 15, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.net/programs/aja-interactive/2019/6/15/مظاهرة-ضد-السوريين-بلبنان-وباسيل-لن.

[228] Gebran Bassil, "If you love Lebanon hire a Lebanese… The FPM Youth Wing" Twitter post, June 8, 2019, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/1137350356931928064.

[229] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

aiming to bring about the closing of the Syrians' shops and the Lebanese shops that employ Syrians.[230] The FPM also published a video to promote a campaign to encourage hiring Lebanese, instead of foreigners, with the campaigners telling Syrians to go back to their country.[231] Lebanese citizens were encouraged to shoot videos/photos that document Lebanese businesses with Syrian workers, for submission to authorities so they can take actions against those breaking labor laws. Finally, flyers were distributed to Lebanese citizens, with the phrases "Syria is safe for returns" and "Lebanon cannot take it".[232]

These efforts helped FPM to gather many supporters for its anti-refugee campaigns and to bring about the closing of some enterprises that employed Syrians.[232] The Movement's claim in doing so was that it was trying to raise awareness about the Lebanese Labor Law, to protect the Lebanese labor force and to protect the Lebanese youth from migration. Regardless of their justification based on national concerns, their crude and racist behavior involving verbal insults, kicking out the Syrian employees out of shops and forcing the employers to firing them, and the demands for their return to Syria reveal the nature of the campaign clearly.[233] In the light of these efforts, it is evident that Gebran Bassil has a pioneering role in the campaigns against the refugees, and contributes to the organization of protests to bring about the firing of Syrian refugees. He claimed that these measures are in the right steps to take, and argued that "Of course we want to distinguish Lebanese from foreigners in labor, housing, taxes and other things," adding "This is not racial discrimination, but the consolidation of state sovereignty." He continued his intense statements against the refugees by saying that "It is normal for us to defend the Lebanese workforce from any foreign labor, whether it is Syrian, Palestinian, French, Saudi, Iranian or

[230] Kareem Chehayeb, "Lebanese above all: The politics of scapegoating Syrian refugees"

[231] Leen Alfaisal, "What's the story behind the hashtag demanding the Lebanese FM's dismissal?" *Al Arabiya News*, June 10, 2019, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2019/06/10/What-s-the-story-behind-the-hashtag-demanding-the-Lebanese-FM-s-dismissal-.

[232] Kareem Chehayeb, "Lebanese above All: The Politics of Scapegoating Syrian Refugees," *The New Arab*, June 17, 2019, https://english.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/scapegoating-syrian-refugees-lebanon.

[233] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

American. The Lebanese come 'first'."[234] In this respect, in so much as Gebran Bassil has actively engaged with the campaign against the Syrian refugees, flagrant hatred against the refugees gained resonance in the public sphere.

Furthermore, it can be argued that these discriminative statements and mainly exaggerated testimonies certainly were used as a tool for provocation against the Syrians.[235] Especially in 2019 when Lebanon faced severe economic problems and financial collapse, the foreign minister and other Lebanese government officials blamed the Syrian refugees for corruption in Lebanese economy.[236] On Labor Day, 1 May 2019, the FPM launched a campaign around the slogan "In order to continue their (labors) feast, do not employ non-Lebanese".[237] As it is clear from the previous examples, these kinds of hate speeches and racist acts taken by FPM are not new trends, and they are instead associated with the core political discourse of the FPM and its leaders.

Certainly, the refugees have been accused of worsening the economic situation and creating the economic crisis that the country has been facing. They provided a more comfortable scapegoat compared to blaming and resolving the inherent economic corruption in the country. Moreover, most of these campaigns, as it is obvious from the facts cited above, have been mostly conducted by politicians and political movements such as the FPM, create polarization in the country between the refugees and workers, without pointing out the existing political and economic troubles that have brought about the economic crisis in Lebanon. One cannot deny the

[234] Gebran Bassil, "It is natural for us to defend the Lebanese workforce against any other labor, whether it is Syrian, Palestinian, French, Saudi, Iranian, or American, for the Lebanese is "before all"." Twitter post, 08:00 a.m., June 8, 2019, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/1137449221072838656.

[235] El Mufti, "Official Response to the Syrian refugee Crisis in Lebanon, the Disastrous Policy of No-Policy

[236] Chehayeb, "Lebanese above all: The politics of scapegoating Syrian refugees" .

[237] Farik Tahrir, "Ongoing tragedy: Lebanon wages war on Syrian refugees" *Noon Post*, September 23, 2016, https://www.noonpost.com/content/14089.

fact that the already challenging economic and political environment of Lebanon only worsened with the advent of the Syrian crisis. However, one should also note that, at that time, Lebanon was already struggling with economic crisis as well as political deadlock related to the presidential election, coupled with the failure to set up a new government despite extended negotiations.[238] Hence, it can be said that some politicians are blaming the Syrians for the problems Lebanon is currently facing, driving the Lebanese workers and refugees against each other. However, instead of addressing the longstanding economic crisis, they blamed the Syrian refugees as the force behind the economic crisis. Various studies and publications argue and show that the facts picked by the politicians are not about an accurate reflection of truth, and more about hiding the government's shortcomings in terms of means and infrastructure, not to mention its inability to response to the burden of the Syrian influx.

In addition to various debates on how to address the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the discussions regarding their repatriation become another common element of Lebanese political landscape. "Voluntariness", "safety" and "sustainability" norms adopted by the UNHCR regarding the repatriation process of the refugees[239] became contentious issues among the political actors. Rather than "voluntary" returns, FPM advocates the notion of "safe" as the only sustainable solution for Syrian refugees.[240] Gebran Bassil took the helm in insisting on the immediate repatriation of refugees through any means.[241] He claimed that the Syrian refugees could return to Syria because Syria is no longer a dangerous place, and is safe

[238] "Lebanon: 2014 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report; Press Release; And Statement By The Executive Director For Lebanon" International Monetary Fund, July 2014, https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr14237.pdf.

[239] "Handbook Voluntary repatriation", UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/bg/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2016/12/Handbook_Voluntary-Repatriation_1996.pdf .

[240] Fakhoury, "Refugee return and fragmented governance in the host state: displaced Syrians in the face of Lebanon's divided politics," *Third World Quarterly*, 42:1, (2021): 162-180, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2020.1762485.

[241] Fakhoury, "Refugee return and fragmented governance,".

for the refugees to return. He claimed that the majority of the refugees stay in Lebanon for economic reasons rather than out of fear for or threats to their security. He alleged that "They are staying because they are assisted to stay in Lebanon, and if they go back to Syria they will lose that assistance. This is the main reason."[242] He added "They are receiving aid for every aspect of their lives. They are receiving free education, shelter, and healthcare. The healthcare coverage they have is better than the one applicable to Lebanese. They are afraid that once they leave, they will lose the assistance".[243] For this reason, Gebran Bassil has pursued a procedure to accelerate the return of the Syrians to their homeland, as he believes that Syria is safe to return.[244]

Gebran Bassil also accused some groups and organizations for their plans and attempts to settle the refugees in Lebanon. Mainly accusing EU and UNHCR**,** he argued that international community is injecting funds into refugee stay.[242] He further alleged that they are trying to convince the refugees that returning to their country is unsafe and that their repatriation can risk their life by stating that;

> Lebanon is exposed to a conspiracy, and no one says that there is no plan of resettling the displaced Syrians in Lebanon, and that there is a system of press, finance and politics that is working on encouraging the refugees to stay in Lebanon and directing attacks against the Lebanese request of returning the Syrians. [245]

Besides the accusations of Gebran Bassil, he also worked to take the decision of suspending the residency applications of the UNHCR on 8 June 2018 by blaming

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[242] Guardian, "Thousands of Syrian Refugees Could Be Sent Back, Says Lebanese Minister,".

[243] Karam, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees'".

[244] Karam, Joyce, "Gebran Bassil: Lebanon does not accept Syrians as 'refugees' "*The National World*, 25 September 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/world/gebran-bassil-lebanon-does-not-accept-syrians-as-refugees-1.773658

[245] Gebran Bassil, "Lebanon is exposed to a conspiracy and no one says that there is no plan of resettlement the displaced Syrians in Lebanon" Twitter post, 07:35 pm, June 14, 2019, .https://twitter.com/gebran_bassil/status/1139798564102639616

them that they are hindering the Syrians from returning to their countries.[246] These measures obviously have also hardened the situation of the UNCHR in Lebanon.

Using rhetorical, polarizing style Gebran Bassil's negative discourse regarding the Syrian refugees, as he frames their presences a potential threat, it could be argued that it has an impact of the public as they are voicing their opposition to the resettlement of the Syrian citizens. Furthermore, the government's incompetence is highlighted in his discourse, as he reinforces the ideology of the inability of the government to manage the incoming refugee flow in an organized and safe manner that led to not providing the refugees with appropriate paperwork and identification and because of that they might be dangerous by not being legitimate. This argument also fuels the public with doubt that these refugees are a danger for their nation and society.

His rhetoric on refugees continued to be framed negatively bearing discriminative manners, as during a party event, he called the FPM supporters to take position against the Syrians presence in Lebanon by saying that; "The Syrians have one place to go: Back to their country,"[247] and he added; "Yes, we are Lebanese racists, but we know how to be Arab in our belonging, global in our [diaspora] and strong in our openness".[248]

Bassil's speeches were started to show superiority over the others that were displaced in the country. This superiority complex was reflected by his previous comments about the Lebanese nationalism that is inherited genetically as he claimed in the following tweet;

[246] "Lebanon Freezes UNHCR Staff Residency Applications in Row over Syrian Refugees," Reuters, June 8, 2018, sec. World News, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-lebanon-syria-refugees-unhcr-idUKKCN1J41L1.

[247] Timour Azhari, "Why is Lebanon's Gebran Bassil so controversial?" *Al-Jazeera*, Jan 25, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/lebanon-gebran-bassil-controversial-200125114942304.html

[248] Azhari, "Why is Lebanon's Gebran Bassil so controversial?".

> We have devoted the concept of our belonging to Lebanon, which is different and above any other belonging. We said it is genetics as it is the only explanation to our similarities and distinctions, to our bearings and adaptations to our flexibility and solidarity, and our ability to integrate from one hand and to reject displacement and asylum from another.[249]

As Bassil was implying that the Lebanese genes unite the people in rejection towards the Syrian displacement into the country, he has declared a racial discrimination and hostility on Syrian and Palestinian refugees. This gave a glimpse of a chauvinistic and a racist undertone alongside to his scapegoating.

According to Marfleet, all that is needed to spread xenophobia within the public is a politician that has the ability stimulate these feelings by his discourses.[250] It is claimed by him that; "Politicians and state officials often justify their policies as responses to mass opinion: the state is innocent, merely reflecting the concerns of its citizens".[251] He also argues that the politicians can use the refugees to blame them for the economic, social and cultural tensions where the politicians are reflecting their own interests and views under the 'mass interests'. The states are masking their own interests by the mass interests. As well as these politicians' acts are leading to exclusionary racism by considering the 'others' as enemies and embodiment them as they are the sources behind the political problems.[252] It could be said that, most important part of this process is creating 'us' versus 'them' and using discursive governance to influence the public sphere by empowering the opposites and attract the people to see the refugees as enemies and the reason of many problems in the country.

Anti-refugee campaigns like the "Lebanese above all" and "If you love Lebanon hire a Lebanese" have continued by the assertion of Gebran Bassil. Gebran

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[249] Gebran Bassil, "We have devoted a concept of our Lebanese affiliation that is above any other affiliation" Twitter post, 08:07 p.m., Jun 06, 2019, https://twitter.com/Gebran_Bassil/status/1136907609431314432.

[250] Philip Marfleet, *Refugees in a Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 280.

[251] Marfleet, *Refugees in a Global Era*, 280.

[252] Marfleet, *Refugees in a Global Era*, 280-290.

Bassil and his political party launched a campaign against the refugees with no political protection for the Syrian refugee. The campaign included accusing the Syrians of not wanting to return to their homes and also accusing them for terrorist acts.[253] It also included portraying the refugees as the base of all the problems within the country and that they are threating the Lebanese entity and social cohesion. Besides the negative framing, Bassil showed peak discrimination in his discourses and attitudes towards the refugees. His way of illustrating the Syrian refugees let many of the humanitarian activists described him as racist and sometimes as fascist. The Lebanese population did not all allow for Bassil's racism and he was condemned, but on the other hand, it was obvious that his words encouraged the racist within the country to intensify their attacks on the refugees. Their racist acts were exampled with burning the refugees' camps, fabrication of issues between the civil defense and refugees in the informal camps as it took place in the village of Deir-al Ahmar.

Unfortunately, as having the identity of Prime Minister, Gebran Bassil by his voice against the Syrians has been accused of attracting the Lebanese to have negative ideas about the refugees and increasing sentiments against the resettlement of the Syrians in Lebanon. A notable Syrian journalist and refugee right activist, Mohammad Hassan, argues that the recent violent acts against the refugees are associated directly with Bassil's discourse. He argued that "The increasing hate speech on social media, especially from Lebanese politicians, including Gebran Bassil, is encouraging violence against refugees".[254] Furthermore, the daily attacks against the Syrian refugees have been happening on the ground, and becoming more dangerous by defending the hate speeches and acts as the popular practice for security.

Looking from a political thought perspective, it can be said that Gebran Bassil's policy and governance has a Machiavellian nature. As he is just focusing on returning the Syrians to their homeland in any ways and whatever challenges and risks they might face while returning. This can be described by Machiavellian perspective that ignores all the process and focus on the targeted result, as Bassil focus only on the goal

[253] Adid Nassar, "In his Machiavellian Designs, Bassil is Using Racist Discourse" *The Arab Weekly*, June 16, 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/his-machiavellian-designs-bassil-using-racist-discourse .

[254] Leen Alfaisal, "What's the story behind the hashtag demanding the Lebanese FM's dismissal?".

of the repatriation of the Syrians by ignoring the concern of these people. This consequentialist characteristic that ignores the means and aim the intended outcome can be the best to describe Gebran Bassil's attitudes towards the refugees generally and especially the Syrians. As long as Bashar Assad stays in power and the conflict in Syria continue, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not able to return back and they cannot leave in huge masses to Europe due to the increasing rejectionist policy of the EU since the forces of right wing is rising. Therefore, with Bassil's Machiavellian campaign against the Syrian refugees, the refugees find themselves facing an open war with discrimination and racism without political cover neither from the Syrian government or the Arab and international countries, leaving them more susceptible to abuse.[255]

Overall, the arguments in Gebran Bassil's discourses can be characterized by rhetoric that stressed the threat of refugees on the country. He defined the Syrians with many different negative aspects, their burden to the country, their negative effects to the economy, their threat to the security, demography he has exploited the refugee issue by identifying them always with problems and showing them as the reason of many problems in the country. As he attributed the economic and security problems of the country to the Syrian refugees, on every occasion, he called for limiting their numbers through deportation and restrictions.[256] His discourse was based on flagrant hatred towards the refugees. He alleged that "The Syrian refugee crisis is the biggest crisis threatening the Lebanese entity," stating that they were a threat to the safety, economy and identity of Lebanon.[257]

The major points that he concentrated in forming his rhetoric about the Syrians involved the indispensable rights of the Lebanese citizens, as he believes that the Syrians are trespassing the rights of the Lebanese citizens. The danger of the hate speeches becomes more obvious when all the time the Minister of Foreign Affairs have

[255] Nassar, "In his Machiavellian Designs, Bassil is Using Racist Discourse" .

[256] Yazan Al-Asaadi, "The diversion strategy: Lebanese racism, classism, and the refugees*", Middle East Institute*, February 13, 2018 https://www.mei.edu/publications/negotiating-protection-syrian-refugee-response .

[257] Al-Asaadi, "The diversion strategy,".

been seen in the media and television directing flagrant hate speeches against the refugees. The dangerous issue here is the using of the state agencies, institutions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other ministries, security services and municipalities in conducting campaigns against the refugees.[258] It can be argued that he had tried to politically instrumentalize the issues caused by the refugees to practice his rejection towards the displaced population.

The close relations of FPM with the Syrian regime have showed a parallel manner towards the attitudes of refugees. As it is clear from the example above, Gebran Bassil is inescapable of his political spectrum. Consequently, it is possible to talk about three factors from his attitudes; first of all is to preserve the sectarian balance in the country, second is that he is trying to protect the political balance that he supports by his allies in the region, and third to hide their failure of governance. In that sense, it might be argued that the way that Gebran Bassil defined, described and accused the Syrian refugees match with their political interests.

3.2 Hassan Nasrallah

Another prominent political leader that has opposed the Syrian refugee existence in Lebanon is the Lebanese Shia Muslim leader and Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah is the political party of Shiite Muslims in Lebanon and a militant group.[259] Nasrallah is a popular political character in Lebanon and the region.[260] When the outrage of the war in Syria led to an increase in Syrian refugees in the country, Hassan Nasrallah started to frame these people negatively like several vital figures in Lebanon. Before entering to the details of Nasrallah's discourse and attitudes towards Syrian refugees, a brief information about him and his political party will be elaborated by pointing how Hezbollah emerged as one of the essential

[258] Azhari, "Why is Lebanon's Gebran Bassil so controversial?".

[259] Kali Robinson, "What Is Hezbollah?," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 1, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah.

[260]Robinson, "What Is Hezbollah?,"

organizations in the Middle East despite its reputation as it is marked as a terrorist organization by the West, particularly the United States.[261] Furthermore, elaborating its relationship with Syria as the relations between Hezbollah and Syria have always been pro-Assad due to its shared affiliation with Iran and anti-Western standpoint.

Hassan Nasrallah became interested in political groups, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. He emerged in the political scene when he elected as the general secretary of Hezbollah in 1992 to be the third general secretary of the party following the assassination of the former one Abbas Al-Musawi.[262] His appointment coincided with Hezbollah's image transformation from an Islamist resistance movement outside the Lebanese system to a Lebanese national party playing by the political rules. Hence, Nasrallah supported the moves toward integration and Hezbollah's participation in the 1992 elections, the first after the 1975–1990 Civil War, demonstrating that its transition from an Islamist movement into a mainstream party was genuinely nationalist orientation.[263]

Hezbollah is a political party of Shiite Muslims in Lebanon and a strong actor both in the political system of Lebanon and in the regional arena.[269] Initially, Hezbollah was independent of the Lebanese politics and was considered to be Iranian associated militia group that classified as a group with terroristic activity by Americans, EU and some western countries,[264] and as global security threat.[265] However, over time Hezbollah evolved to participate in the Lebanese politics and win elections and get seats in the parliament. Meanwhile, particularly Hezbollah by its resilience against

[261] "Foreign Terrorist Organizations - United States Department of State," United States Department of State, 2019, https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/.

[262] Dina Matar, "Hassan Nasrallah: The cultivation of image and language in the making of a charismatic leader." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8, no. 3 (2015): 434-435.

[263] Matar, "Hassan Nasrallah," 435.

[264] Matar, "Hassan Nasrallah,".

[265] Norton, *Hezbollah,*.

Israel has been started to seen as a legitimate element by the authorities of Syria and Lebanon.[266]

Hezbollah was not formed in the way parties usually do, it emerged as a resistance movement that uttered oath of expelling the western powers from Lebanon and destroying Israel.[267] In fact, the birth of the created and established organization Hezbollah was not like other Lebanese organizations. The idea of forming the party was practically launched in the early eighties, specifically in the year 1982, which is the history of chaos with difficult turns and major dangers that struck Lebanon with 15 years of civil war and the start of the widespread Israeli military invasion of Lebanese territories that turned political and military equations in the entire region upside down and brought Lebanon into the unknown. In this regard, following its establishment the main goal of Hezbollah was resistance against Israel rather than the internal political disputes.

Furthermore, the victory of the 1979 Iranian Revolution played a role and had an influencing factor in the process of establishing the core of a new and specifically Shiite Islamic situation in Lebanon that later produced Hezbollah. Hence, Hezbollah's name has long been associated with Iran. It is a situation that was influenced and interacted a lot with the Islamic state of Iran. Rather, it carried its concepts and followed the same principles and slogans in a coherent manner. It is also committed to the end with the ideas and attitudes of the founder and inspiration of the Iranian Islamic revolution, Imam Al-Khomeini. It is considered by many in Lebanon to be the party of Iran, as it is an extension of Iran's principles and the nature of its strong relationship with Iran.[268] Since its formation, Hezbollah adhered to the 'Wilayat al-Faqih' authority.[269] In the open letter that published by Hezbollah in 1985, the authority of the

[266] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 76.

[267] Kali Robinson, "What Is Hezbollah?," *Council on Foreign Relations,* September 1, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah.

[268] Tür, "The Lebanese War Of 2006".

[269] Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Routledge Handbook of Political Islam", *Routledge Handbooks Online,* December, 2020 https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429425165

'Wilayat al-Faqih' was approved. Moreover, in the mentioned letter Hezbollah explained that it will obey the orders of 'Wilayat al-Faqih'.[270]

Since its establishment, Hezbollah relied on Iran and Syria in terms of financial backing, weapons, training and ideological guidance.[271] Following the 1982 Israel invasion of Lebanon, Iran has provided great support to the party at all levels and fields, especially the military field, where it sent many officers to train and arm Hezbollah fighters.[272] They set up special training camps in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. Hezbollah's fighting forces began to form in the time that Lebanon was in a state of loss and failure as a result of the Israeli invasion of its lands. Hezbollah maintains its own military force as it enhanced its military power by the support of Iran and Syria, as it became known by that "a state within a state".[273] It has an army much powerful and better equipped than Lebanon's, on Lebanese soil.[274] However, Hezbollah gained legitimization by the Lebanese and Syrian authorities as it positioned for a resistance movement against Israel's action in south Lebanon.[275] It is considered as a new phenomenon in the international relations as being a non-state actor backed by the regional power with all attributes of a state.[276]

Regarding Hezbollah relations with Syria, it was strengthened in the period when Bashar Al Assad took power following his father's death in 2000. Hezbollah

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[270] "The Hizballah Program an Open Letter," International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, February 1, 1988, https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/The%20Hizballah%20Program%20-%20An%20Open%20Letter.pdf.

[271] Tür, "The Lebanese War Of 2006".

[272] Robinson, "What Is Hezbollah?,".

[273] Harris, "Assad's Lebanon Gamble,".

[274] Henry A. Kissinger, "After Lebanon", *The Washington Post*, September 13, 2006, https://www.henryakissinger.com/articles/after-lebanon/.

[275] Rabil, *Syria, The United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East*, 76.

[276] Kissinger, "After Lebanon".

was considered as a power mechanism domestically and regionally for the Syrian regime, which could be used to support the Syrian presence in Lebanon in face of the oppression and additionally to this to be used as a proxy force against the external powers particularly Israel.[277] As it is mentioned before, Lebanon is politically divided between the supporters of the Syrian regime in one side, and the opponents in other side. This division escalated when Lebanon witnessed two different divisions in the people's opinions towards Syria after the assassination of the Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in March 2005, some condemned Syria for being most likely a part of the assassination (14 March Alliance), while others were praising Syria for being involved in the Lebanese politics (8 March Alliance). Hezbollah was in the side of the pro-Syrian policies, as it has close and mutual relations with Syria and Iran from its initial establishment years.[278]

The withdrawal of Israel in 2000 from Lebanon was perceived as a victory for Hezbollah by the Lebanese Shiites and a significant part from Lebanese people. Even it evokes admiration among the Arab world, too. Additionally, Israel-Lebanon War in 2006 made Hezbollah a vital political actor both domestically in Lebanon and regionally in the Middle East region as it is considered as an exemplary for the opposition minded Muslims.[279]

Unlike the other three political leaders investigated in this study, Hezbollah General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah does not have any social media account. He gives his speeches throughout some television channels. As a result, this chapter will elaborate on the analysis of Hassan Nasrallah's stance towards the Syrian refugees observed from his speeches on television and interviews rather than social media stream.

When the Syrian conflict broke up in 2011, the "disassociation policy" was declared by Lebanon to dissociate Lebanon from regional conflicts and to not allow

[277] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 76.

[278] Norton, *Hezbollah*,

[279] Northon, *Hezbollah*,

the spillover of the Syrian conflict over to Lebanon by forcing the political parties to not involve in the Syrian conflict and taking side with the Syrian regime or with its opponents and avoiding any interaction with the Syrian regime in the governmental level. However, in practice, this policy turned a blind eye to the Lebanese reality of the two coalitions, the 8 March pro-Syrian regime and 14 March against the Syrian regime.[280] Hence, even if they tried to be neutral, these two camps covertly did not stay neutral; they vocally and logistically supported their sides.[282] Hezbollah is one of the parties that later overtly involved in the Syrian conflict beside the Syrian regime, even if it initially denied the military involvement.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah initially announced that: "Lebanese should not interfere in what is going on in Syria but let the Syrians themselves deal with the issue"[281] by indicating that Hezbollah will preserve its commitment to the security and stability of Syria, on the contrary to what he said for the other Arab states' uprisings in the Middle East in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. As his speeches towards the Arabs uprisings is observed and examined in this study, he certainly encouraged the people to topple their governments.[282]

In May 2013, Hassan Nasrallah announced that Hezbollah would not leave the Syrian regime alone and defeat it. In one of his speeches, he argued that by saying, "Hereupon, we support every serious pursuit of a political solution or settlement in Syria and of preventing Syria's fall into the grip of the US, Israel, and the Takfiris."[283] Hence, it could be said that during the Arab Spring in 2011, Hezbollah adopted a fragmented foreign policy in response to the demonstrations, first supporting Arab

[280] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 6.

[281] Mona Alami, " Hezbollah's Military Involvement in Syria and Its Wider Regional Role" *Dirasat*, No.21, (March, 2017):.

[282] Qifa Nabki, "Nasrallah on Syria: More Equal than Others*?" Qifa Nabki: News And Commentary From The Levant* May 26, 2011, https://qifanabki.com/2011/05/26/some-arab-revolutions-are-more-equal-than-others/.

[283] "Speeches-2013:Sayyed Nasrallah: Resistance Ready to Receive ...," *Alahednews*, accessed February 2, 2022, https://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/25026/454.

revolutionaries in North Africa while concurrently collaborating with the Assad government against the Syrian people. Backing for popular Arab revolts in North Africa was ascribed to the fact that Tunisia's and Egypt's previous governments to be seen as emissaries of America and Israel rather than representatives of the people's will. In this regard, it is important to draw attention on how the political interests playing a role in shaping the politics.

Additionally, Nasrallah argued that they decide the military involvement in Syria a little bit late, but instead, they knew the decision they had reached eventually by saying that: "We decided to intervene against the scheme devised for Syria; our decision was not something we came up with that very moment."[284] They interfere in the Syrian conflict on the side of the Syrian regime by asserting that their military involvement there, is for the protection of Lebanon from the Jihadists and to secure the essential resistance alliance against Israel.[3] In this regard, he argued that;

> In Syria now there is no longer a popular uprising or reform matters. We believe that the control of armed groups [Slafi-jihadists] over Syria or over certain Syrian provinces adjacent to Lebanon constitutes a grave danger for Lebanon ad for all Lebanese…. Those who fight in Syria are an extension of the Islamic State of Iraq that killed scholars and bombed mosques… and churches…. Syria is the back of the Resistance and its support, and the Resistance cannot stand idly by. [285]

Therefore, Nasrallah tried to show his intervention to Syria as a matter for all the Lebanese security and well-being. Hassan Nasrallah was also trying to include the Lebanese government by pressuring the Najib Mikati's government to interfere in resolving the civil war happening in Syria. In a conference in Baalbak, he urged the government to find a resolution to the Syrian crisis as he said: "I call the Lebanese government of have a role in Syria, and to be active in finding a solution for the war, if this war continues more blood will be set and the battle will go on further." [286]

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[284] "Speeches-2013:Sayyed Nasrallah: Resistance Ready to Receive ...,".

[285] Rabil, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*, 6-7.

[286] Hwaida Saad, Anne Barnard, and Christine Hauser, "Hezbollah Chief Urges Lebanon to Help in Syrian Crisis," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/04/world/middleeast/syria-hezbollah-lebanon-Nasrallah-.html.

Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to say that their interests in the politics have shaped and affected the way to interpret the conflict in Syria and to response later to the refugee issues.

Nasrallah, on the other hand, had a distinct perspective on Syrian demonstrations as he defines them as radical terrorists. Hezbollah continued to back the Syrian regime against demonstrators due to Assad's sympathy for Palestinians, affiliation with Iran, antagonism against Western powers, and seeming readiness to participate in change. Thus, Nasrallah supported Assad's so-called promised reforms.[287]

Primarily, when referring to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Nasrallah favours the word "displaced" rather than "refugees". Since, the term "displaced" does in favour of the Lebanese state, whereas "refugees" are protected by international law and have certain rights, "displaced individuals" do not have the same level of protection and rights. Furthermore, the term "displaced" may denote a more temporary position than the term "refugee," particularly in a nation like Lebanon, where Palestinian refugees have settled since 1948 and became permanent population in Lebanon.[288] From how Nasrallah has framed the Syrian in Lebanon, it is clear that the humanitarian approach that Hezbollah adopted, at the beginning, has shifted towards a more, to some extends, pragmatic approach. As Nasrallah also prefers to classify them a displaced people rather than a refugee and the more negative framing by other significant officials who also consider the Syrian as a burden for the country.

In addition, Nasrallah's discourse on the Syrian refugees in Lebanon was initially concerned on the idea of humanitarian consideration as he stated that;

> We should deal with the presence of Syrian refugees in a purely humanitarian manner and not opposition it (…) The Syrian families should be taken care of

[287] Christopher Phillips, *The battle for Syria* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2016):.

[288] Viveka Bergh "Hizbullah's Construction of National Identity: We are in principle not like Others", 2015.

by the Lebanese government, whether they were with the opposition or the regime or in-between.[289]

Then it is possible to observe the changes in his standpoint towards the Syrian refugees after their involvement to the Syrian conflict in 2013. Within the framework of the Syrian refugee's representation in Lebanon, it is clear that a new discourse on how the Syrian refugees have been categorized has been shifted from "people who should be helped accordingly following the humanitarian affairs" to become a "burden" for Lebanon. One of the studies stated that the shift from a positive representation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon towards negative representation has also been shared by several other government officials in the country.[290]

Different factors could be argued behind the shift of Nasrallah's discourse on changing his discourse towards the Syrian refugees. Perhaps it would be fair to argue that one of Nasrallah's motives behind his standpoint shift towards the Syrian refugees in Lebanon leaning towards negative representation could be the concern of economic consideration that the country has been struggling with over the years. Alongside the rapid movement of Syrian refugees' influx towards the country, the population of the Syrians in the country has increase sharply; it put concern on several figures such as Nasrallah, and other political figures to take a more realistic approach towards this issue by putting the Lebanese economic interest first. The Lebanese economy has been in a problematic situation, and the negative representation of Syrian refugees by the political figures inferred that the country is just simply struggling in dealing with the Syrian refugees in a more idealistic or rather pragmatic humanitarian approach in its practice. However these not change the fact that the evolution of Nasrallah's attitudes towards the refugees started following Hezbollah's involvement to the Syrian conflict in 2013. Hassan Nasrallah rejected the calls for building camps for the Syrian refugees

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[289] "Mikati: Lebanon to reconsider approach to refugee influx." The Daily Star Lebanon, November, 21, 2013, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Nov-21/238576-mikati- lebanon-to-reconsider-approach-to-refugee-influx.ashx (Accessed 26 August 2021).

[290] Marcela Guerrero Turbay, "The 'Politics of Representation': Syrian Refugees in the Official Discourse in Lebanon (2011-2015)" *Social Justice Perspectives (SJP),* December 11, 2015, hdl.handle.net/2105/33006.

in Lebanon. He alleged that building camps will provide solid ground for Sunni extremists that are fighting against the regime.[291]

Additionally, the construction of the notion of Syrians as a burden and threat in Lebanon could be analyzed with speeches of Nasrallah given on Al-Manar Television channel that belongs to Hezbollah. Nasrallah repeatedly emphasized the threat of the displaced Syrians in his discourse by making connection with the existing problems in the country. For instance, in one of his talks he argued that 'The third matter, it is assisting Lebanon to solve the problem of the displaced people. If the problem of the displaced is solved, it will keep away a lot of the danger of terrorists and terrorism and of civil strife and the problems regarding the Lebanese situation.'[292].[293] In this quote, Nasrallah made vague correlations between the 'displaced Syrians', and the threat of 'extremism', and 'terrorism'. He associated the displaced (referring to the Syrian refugees) with terrorism, civil strife and national problems.

Nasrallah believes that the solution to the Syrian refugee problem in Lebanon is to send them back to their country, ignoring all the facts and problems that prompted these refugees to leave their country and flee to Lebanon. Having good relations with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on the 30th of June 2018, Hassan Nasrallah, announced that he promised the Syrian president to return the refugees to their country, when the Syrian refugees in Lebanon started a severe racist confrontation. For instance, in his speech, Nasrallah said:

> We will put in place a mechanism to return the largest possible number of displaced people who want safe return in coordination with the government of the Syrian regime and the Lebanese public security. We are facing a group of complications in dealing with this file and out of the nature of our good, solid and strong relations with the Syrian state, and also being part of the situation

[291]Hugh Eakin, "Hezbollah's Refugee Problem," *The New York Review of Books*, accessed February 2, 2022, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2013/08/12/hezbollahs-humanitarian-game/.

[292] Viveka Bergh, "Hizbullah's Construction of National Identity".

[293] Viveka Bergh, "Hizbullah's Construction of National Identity".

in Lebanon, we want to take advantage of this rationale to extend a helping hand.[294]

This speech coincided with the compulsion of many Syrian refugees to return to their country, contrary to what the party's Secretary-General indicated, in which he claimed that the Lebanese government and the parties concerned would not force any refugees to return to Syria. In April of the same year, more than 400 refugees in the town of Arsal were forced to return to their villages in Syria, where the people suffered from bombing and indiscriminate killing at the same time.[295] The question here is whether Nasrallah aims to reduce the burden that refugees created on Lebanon and help the refugees to go back to their homeland safely or is he running after another interest. This question is raised because the Syrian regime will not have mercy on most of these refugees in the event of their return, as it is obvious by different examples from the previous experiences of the refugees that returned. However, he still believes the return of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to Syria will not cause any problem to them despite of many cases that have returned to the country. Among these are ones who were sent to prisons to face torture and oppression and in the best cases will live under the worst possible living conditions.

Hassan Nasrallah and his party tried to take advantage of the racist movement against the Syrians in that period to return the refugees to their country, claiming that their presence in Lebanon is political and, once dissolved, they must return to their country. However, Hassan Nasrallah's call was not received by the refugees in the Lebanese town of Arsal nor by the original citizens of the town who believe that the matter is humanitarian and social before it is political, as they fully believe that returning to Syria means confronting a repressive regime. In addition, Selena Nasr, a researcher at Amnesty International, argued that the Hezbollah invitation of Syrians return is a part of incitement against them in Lebanon. In other words, she believes that he aims to show that their presence as refugees is no longer necessary after he

[294] 'Nasrallah: We will set up a mechanism to return the largest number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to their country' Anadolu Agency, 2018, https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/953932-نصر-الله سنساعد-عودة اللاجئين السوريين-وطنهم/

[295] 'Nasrallah: We will set up a mechanism to return the largest number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to their country'

claimed that their areas are safe. The analyst Ayman Al-Tamimi agreed with Selena in this vision and further stated that "Hassan Nasrallah will use the call to increase anti-refugee sentiments in order to boost the popularity of his party in Lebanon".[300]

Hassan Nasrallah alongside his party had started the process of returning Syrian refugees to their countries starting from 3rd July 2018, when a specialized committee was formed, which distributed forms to Syrian refugees in some Lebanese regions intending to start the deportation process. Furthermore, Hassan Nasrallah admitted that one of the main issues that drove his party and encouraged it to take the lead in this matter is the economic burden and the burden on infrastructure and job opportunities and that this step takes place in the interest of the Lebanese first. He stated that "Despite our love for the Syrians who consider themselves in their country, it is better for them to return to their home country, in order to relieve Lebanon, which has experienced many problems."[296] In this regard, the Syrian refugees in the discourse of Nasrallah was much criticized for conveying to the public to that the presence of Syrians in Lebanon is threat to their nation.

Actions and statements by a crucial political party in Lebanon reaffirm that political movements in Lebanon do not aim to protect refugees but rather do not mind endangering their lives in exchange for the achievement of some other political interests. In other words, Nasrallah seems to persuade the media and the Lebanese citizens that the presence of refugees in Lebanon has become a burden on the country, and the best solution is to return these refugees to their country. Moreover, while the United Nations Organization stated that the return of refugees to Syria is an insecure step, Hassan Nasrallah continued the procedures for returning these refugees. He succeeded in returning 500 Syrian refugees within two months before this movement stopped due to the refusal of many international competent authorities and the refugees themselves.

In a speech delivered by Nasrallah singled out part of his speech to talk about the obstacle in the repatriation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, he argued that the real reason behind it is that the Americans and some Western countries including some

[296] Daniel Meier, "Popular Mobilizations in Lebanon: From Anti-System to Sectarian Claims," *Democracy and Security* 11, No. 2 (2015): 176–89.

Gulf states do not want the displaced Syrians to return, and that the reason is political and has nothing to do with humanitarian, security or economic considerations. He asserted that because America, the West, and some Gulf states offer this political consideration, they force Lebanon to prevent the return of displaced Syrians. He affirmed that he had several meetings with Bashar Assad and ensured that he wants all Syrians to return to Syria. Additionally, alleged that the claims regarding the Syrian refugees who returned from Lebanon to Syria that they are being arrested by the regime forces and intelligence during their entry from the official crossings are merely rumours and lies, and all who returned to Syria live in Syria like the rest of the Syrians.[297]

To sum up, As for the ongoing Syrian conflict, even though Lebanon has attempted to adhere to separate itself from the Syrian crisis by declaring the disassociation policy, Hezbollah disregarded this approach and openly expressed their support for the Syrian government and declared to the world that Hezbollah will indulged in the Syrian war beside the regime.[298] The year 2013 denoted a defining moment of declaration by Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah to partake in the battling in Syria. Simultaneously, in one of his talks, Hassan Nasrallah referenced that the party stays in Syria if the reasons remain. Hezbollah has consistently been a partner of the Ba'ath Party and has aligned with both the administrations of Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad since its initiation. It helped the Syrian armed forces during the Syrian Civil War against the equipped Syrian opposition and portrayed the revolution against the system as "a scheme that intends to crush the alliance with Assad against Israel".

Hence, the response of Nasrallah to the mass refugee flow has clearly changed from a humanitarian aspect to a political aspect following the involvement of

[297] Alex Lederman, "The Human Cost of Normalizing Assad," *Foreign Policy*, accessed February 2, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/03/syria-bashar-al-assad-normalize-refugees-lebanon/.

[298] Yavuz Güçtürk, *The Loss of Humanity the Human Rights Dimension of the Civil War in Syria* (İstanbul, Turkuaz Matbaacılık, 2014): 40, https://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20140722151506_the-loss-of-humanity-the-human-rights-dimension-of-the-civil-war-in-syria-pdf.pdf.

Hezbollah to the Syrian war. Considering the given situation, it could be argued that the Syrian refugees in Lebanon started to be politicized. Thus, the representation of Syrian refugees has been framed negatively by politicians such as Nasrallah himself. Within the framework of the Syrian refugee's representation in Lebanon, it was observed that a new discourse on how the Syrian refugees have been categorized has been shifted from "people who should be helped accordingly following the humanitarian affairs" to become "burden" and “threat” for Lebanon. It was shifted from a positive representation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon towards a negative representation as it has also been shared by several various government officials in the country.

To conclude, Syrian refugees have been constantly and forcibly shown as the responsible ones for social, security, and economic failure by Gebran Bassil and Hassan Nasrallah. It could be said that the motivation behind these two political leaders’ perception of refugees was mainly fueled with political interests. The analysis show that their concerns for the threat of refugees was not mainly because of the socio-economic crisis that is Lebanon is facing but mostly for the political divergence in the country as they see the majority of Sunni Syrian refugees as an existential threat for the demographical balance and also for security.

CHAPTER 4

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PART 2

4.1 Saad Hariri

Another important political figure to be analyzed regarding the Syrian refugees in Lebanon is Saad Hariri, who served as the prime minister of Lebanon twice, between 2009–11 and 2016–20.[299] He is the leader of the popular political party of the Sunni bloc, the Future Movement (*Tayyar Al Mustakbal*), the biggest force inside the March 14 alliance which was named as remembrance of the day in 2005 when a gigantic anti-Syrian protest occurred in Beirut and restricted Syrian impact in Lebanon's matters.[303]

In general, what differentiates the Future Movement from others is that it is one of the few parties that were established without a relationship with war. Rafik Hariri was the pioneer of the Future Movement, a political association he established himself. After his death in 2005, his initiative was taken over by his son, Saad Hariri following the Cedar Revolution.[303] Note that this revolution occurred as an immediate reason for the passing of Rafiq Hariri and it requested the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon,[300] the development of a worldwide board of trustees to research the death of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the resignation of public security authorities in the nation, and the association of free parliamentary elections. The demonstrators requested the need to end Syrian impact inside the Lebanese state, which consequently culminated with the removal of the Syrian military forces from Lebanon.[301]

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[299] "Saad Al-Hariri: Biography & Facts", Britannica, accessed February 2, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saad-al-Hariri#ref1052928.

[300] Ersun N. Kurtulus, "'The Cedar Revolution': Lebanese Independence and the Question of Collective Self-Determination," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 195–214.

[301] "Syria's Withdrawal from Lebanon 'Historic Day' for Middle East, Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen Tells Security Counsil" *UN Security council Press Releases*, https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/sc8372.doc.html.

Primarily, Saad Hariri became a prime minister following the death of his father, by a horrible assassination which took place in February 2005 in Beirut.[303] As it is believed that the Syrian government was behind the assassination, Saad Hariri began to take a stand against the Syrian government by every means. He is a partner of the Lebanese forces, the Kataeb Party, and other political powers in the March 14 alliance. What characterizes the Future Movement is that it speaks to the larger part in Lebanon, the Sunnis, and is known for its allegiance to Saudi Arabia. Saad Hariri's main success factor to take the position of being the prime minister was after he successfully established the "unity government" where he actually put efforts for it from 2007 to finalize it and get the position by the president Michel Suleiman at the year of 2009.[303]

Hence, the main Shi'i party Hezbollah, that is backed by Iran and the Syrian government and lead by Hassan Nasrallah began gaining seats in the parliament until they reached majority and dismissed Saad Hariri. This was another reason for him to maintain a strong position against the Syrian government.

After giving a brief background about Saad Hariri and his party, in this part of the study, the discourse and attitudes of Saad Hariri regarding the presence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, alongside with his view on their governance will be examined. This study will require his speeches in conferences, assemblies, and interviews, as well as his statements in his social media accounts, mainly his Twitter account.

As the Lebanese government took an open-door policy regarding the Syrian flows, Saad Hariri supported the influx of the Syrians to Lebanon, saw them as vulnerable individuals in need of help and showed compassion at their arrivals to Lebanon.[302] In one of his tweets, he described them as "Syrians fleeing the horror of war and repression in their country",[303] and called everyone to show hospitality and solidarity with them. He put into words that;

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[302] "Merkel Pledges Support for Lebanon," Anadolu Agency, 2022, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/merkel-pledges-support-for-lebanon/788872.

[303] "Hariri: No Syrian Refugee will be Forced to Return if He Does not Want to," CNN Arabic, February 2, 2018, https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/2018/02/02/hariri-syrian-refugees-lebanon.

> The conflict in Syria must end soon, because I am convinced that the refugees want to return to their homeland, and they do not want to remain in Lebanon or to be dispersed between Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. They are eager to return to their homeland, and I believe that most of us, if we were to go in Vacation, we will feel the need to return to our homeland as soon as we finish the vacation... From here, imagine the situation of these refugees, they are in a state of asylum, there is no doubt that they are eager to return to their homeland. Thereby, let's not get into political considerations, and let's not say that they will stay here forever, no they will not stay here forever, but they will return to their homeland.[304]

He primarily tried to focus on the humanitarian side of the displaced Syrians. Initially, he did not only focus on the primary needs of the refugees, but also on their social and educational needs as in one of his statements regarding the needs of the Syrian children, where he said;

> I think it is in everybody's interest to make sure that the Syrian children who are currently living in those three host countries (Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan) have education and health care. We should give them hope that one day Syria will become like it used to be.[305]

He also called to stand with the vulnerable refugees and encouraged the authorized people and the citizens to provide support to them as in one of his speeches in which he thanked and encouraged the municipalities for their help and solidarity towards the refugees by expressing his opinion, stating that;

> Put into effect the local developmental projects within the municipalities, I would like to send my greetings to the Lebanese municipalities that have showed extreme cooperation and hospitality towards the Syrian refugees regardless to their limited capabilities.[306]

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[304] CNN Arabic, "Hariri: No Syrian Refugee will be Forced to Return if He Does not Want to,"

[305] Rachel Martin, "Lebanon's Prime Minister On Help For Syrian Refugees." *Morning Edition*, 2017, accessed August 12, 2020, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=n5h&AN=6XN201707271003&site=eds-live .

[306]Martin, "Lebenon's Prime Minister on Help,".

Saad Hariri insisted on adhering to the "Disassociation Policy" regarding all the regional issues and on the necessity to keep Lebanon away of the foreign and regional conflicts by respecting the decisions of the League of Arab states.[307] He said that;

> The Lebanese Government with all its components is committed to the policy of disassociation. It is closely monitored by all State institutions to ensure it is executed to Lebanon's national interest in keeping the best relations with Arab countries and the international community.[308]

Saad Hariri also stated that the government of Lebanon should be neutral on the Syrian crisis and should continue its work with the international community to perform the responsibilities regarding the displaced Syrians, even though there were some allegations that there was evidence that he was supporting the Sunni Salafi jihadists against the Syrian regime.[309]

Over time, when the refugees were associated with insecurity and rise of terrorism and were described as 'existential threat', he became concerned about the spillover of the Syrian crisis into Lebanon. But this decision has come out after the dissolve of the disassociation policy by the decision of Hezbollah to interfere in the Syrian crisis and took side with the regime of Bashar Assad. However, Saad Hariri blamed Hezbollah in increasing the existential threat of terrorism in Lebanon as Hezbollah interfered in the Syrian conflict which only brought harm to Lebanon as the terrorist attacks have increased in Lebanon.[310] He argued that the rise of car bomb

[307]Martin, "Lebenon's Prime Minister on Help,".

[308]Saad Hariri, "The Lebanese Government with all its components is committed to the policy of disassociation It is closely monitored by all State institutions to ensure it is executed to Lebanon's national interest in keeping the best relations with Arab countries and the international community" Twitter post, March 19, 2018, https://twitter.com/saadhariri/status/975756359814778880.

[309] "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State," International Crisis Group, March 14, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state.

[310] Elias Bejjani, "Hariri: Terrorism 'Existential Threat' to Lebanon/March 14 Reunites with Hariri," Lebanese-Canadian Coordinating Council, August 8, 2014, http://eliasbejjaninews.com/archives/1632/.

attacks and other terrorist attacks in Lebanon (see figure 6)[311] was because of the presence of Hezbollah in Syria. Hereby, he argued that "Hezbollah has severely harmed intra-Muslim ties and placed the Army and security forces at risk of attacks from terrorist groups".[316]

He restated his condemnation for the military intervention of Hezbollah in Syria by saying that "We saw how the Army is paying a hefty price as a result of Hezbollah's insistence on imposing a status quo none of the Lebanese agreed to."[316] He continued to express the importance of noninterfering in the Syrian conflict under any circumstances by saying "If Hezbollah is making mistakes, that does not mean we should respond to it with similar ones or adopt methods that would jeopardize the state."[316] He emphasized on that political parties must commit to the dissociation for the sake of stability in Lebanon. He argued that;

> Any political group seeking stability in Lebanon must adhere to the dissociation policy. I believe pushing all political parties towards a disassociation policy is a must. The best thing is to put aside our differences and move forward in the best for Lebanon's interest.[312]

[311] Zeinab Cherri, "The Lebanese–Syrian crisis: impact of influx of Syrian refugees to an already weak state" *Dove Press Journall,* July 14, 2016 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4948691/table/t2-rmhp-9-165/?report=objectonly.

[312] Naharnet Newsdesk, "Franjieh Meets Hariri, Hints at Possible Electoral Alliance," *Naharnet,* December 12, 2017, https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/239480.

Table 4. 1 Summary of attacks in Lebanon Post-Syrian conflict

Summary of attacks in Lebanon post-Syrian conflict

Date	Area	Target	Method	Death	Injured
Oct 19, 2012	Achrafieh, West Beirut	Wissam Al Hassan, head of the intelligence branch of the ISF	Massive car bomb	8	128
July 9, 2013	Beir el-Abed, South Beirut	Popular street associated with Hezbollah	Car bomb	0	50
Aug 15, 2013	Roueiss, South Beirut	Hezbollah stronghold	Car bomb	27	300
Aug 23, 2013	Tripoli	Two mosques	Two car bombs	42	400
Nov 19, 2013	Suburb, South Beirut	Iranian Cultural Center	Car bomb and explosive motorcycle	22	146
Dec 3, 2013	Beirut	Hassan Lakkis, senior Hezbollah commander	Assassination by two gunmen	1	0
Dec 27, 2013	Downtown, Beirut	Former Minister Mohamad Chatah	Car bomb	6	70
Jan 2, 2014	Haret Hreik, South Beirut	Hezbollah Political Office	Car bomb	4	77
Jan 16, 2014	Hermel	Bustling neighborhood	Car bomb	5	42
Jan 21, 2014	Haret Hreik, South Beirut	Bustling street	Suicide bomber	4	46
Feb 1, 2014	Hermel	Petrol station	Car bomb	4	23
Feb 3, 2014	South Beirut	Van	Suicide bomber	0	2
Feb 19, 2014	Suburb, South Beirut	Iranian Cultural Center	Two car bombs	8	128
Feb 22, 2014	Hermel	Army Post	Car bomb	5	17
March 29, 2014	Arsal	Army soldiers	Car bomb	3	4
June 20, 2014	Dahr Al Baidar	Police checkpoint	Suicide bomber	1	32
June 24, 2014	Beirut	Military checkpoint	Car bomb	0	12
June 27, 2014	Beirut	Hotel	Suicide bomber	0	11
Aug 6, 2014	Tripoli	Army checkpoint	Homemade bomb	1	10
Sept 19, 2014	Arsal	Army	Bomb	2	3
Sept 20, 2014	Eastern Borders of Lebanon	Hezbollah checkpoint	Bomb	2	0
Nov 14, 2014	Arsal	Army	Bomb	0	3
Dec 3, 2014	Arsal	Army	Bomb	1	2
Jan 10, 2015	Tripoli	Café	Suicide bomber	9	30
Jan 26, 2015	Zagharta	Ghassan Ajaj, ISF intelligence officer	Gunman	1	0
March 2, 2015	North Lebanon	Bader Eid, brother of Alawite leader Ali Eid	Gunman	1	0
Nov 5, 2015	Arsal	Qalamoun Muslim Scholars Committee	Motorcycle bomb	5	15
Nov 6, 2015	Arsal	Army	Improvised explosive device	0	5
Nov 12, 2015	Bourj el-Barajmeh, South Beirut	Hezbollah stronghold	Two suicide bombers	43	240
				205	1796

Note: Adapted from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2013). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd.19

Abbreviation: ISF, Internal Security Forces.

It is noteworthy that Saad Hariri also refrains from designating the Syrians as "refugees", like other political actors Saad Hariri insists on referring to them as “displaced” (Nazeh), although on 22 October 2013 the statement of high commissioner of the UNHCR declared the Syrians under international protection since they satisfy the requirements to be defined as refugees as stated in article 1 (A) 2 that was stated in 1951 Refugee Convention, which was made due to the concerns about the exposure to persecution. Preferring to describe them as ‘displaced’ was because of the limited capabilities of the country to provide the necessary needs of refugees and in order to

drop all the legal responsibilities towards them, considering that Lebanon did not sign the refugee convention in the United Nations.[319]

In addition to that, in terms of establishing formal camps for the refugees Hariri asserted on the non-camping policy as he contended that "Some say we should have refugee camps in Lebanon, I say Lebanon has become a big refugee camp".[313] The Lebanese government basically kept opposing the existence of refugee camps due to the fear of the permanent existence of Syrian refugees.[314]

In addition to various debates on how to address the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Hariri focused on the dismissal of supremacist attitudes and discriminative speeches against the Syrian refugees, since he believed that it creates blockage and does not bring the displaced back to their home nation. In other words, when racist rhetoric and actions of the opponents to the presence of refugees in Lebanon escalated, Saad Hariri stood against the discriminative attitudes by saying that: "We want the Syrians to go back to their country, but we reject the racist talks". [315]

It is important to indicate that Saad Hariri tried to avoid any creation of sectarian perception regarding the refugees by stating that the displaced people are not the problem of one religion or sect but of all religions or sects and all the Lebanese people, and it is an issue that all the Lebanese must work on together. Moreover, he alleged that there should be full transparency about this issue, and the racist way of speaking will not bring 1.5 million Syrians back home, instead it will cause unwanted hate.[316]

In the course of events, Hariri started to reveal his concerns about a turning point where the country's economy would reach rock bottom and the Syrian refugees

[313] "PM Hariri: Lebanon Has Become a Big Refugee Camp," AlJazeera, April 1, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/4/1/pm-hariri-lebanon-at-breaking-point-due-to-refugees#:~:text=%E2%80%9CSome%20say%20we%20should%20have.

[314] "PM Hariri: Lebanon at 'breaking point' due to refugees"

[315] "PM Hariri Calls on Brussels Donor Meet to Support Lebanon in Syrian Crisis," Al Bawaba, April 25, 2018, https://www.albawaba.com/news/pm-hariri-calls-brussels-donor-meet-support-lebanon-syrian-crisis-1122250.

were shown as reason for it. He feared of civil unrest because the strains that caused by hosting large number of refugees.[320] "[This is] at a time when the capacities of the host communities and government infrastructure and services are being overstretched and exhausted,"[317] he said. He argued that the increasing numbers of refugees is affecting the country, where the resources are getting scarcer and job opportunities are dropping lower and lower. Based on some surveys in Lebanon, it is possible to state that there was a growing anger towards Syrian refugees and illegal migrants with an extensive view that job opportunities of the locals have been taken by the refugees and illegal migrants.[318] During the donor conference in Brussels, Hariri expressed his concern by stating how the crisis is acutely affecting Lebanon and aggravating its current economic and social challenges.[319] He further addressed by saying *"*The needs remain substantial and the competition over limited resources and jobs has put the relationship between host communities and the displaced under severe tensions."[320] He pointed out the risk of tensions by indicating "and partly because the host communities have seen their economic and social conditions worsen due to the crisis."[321]

Hariri expressed globally his fears that the Lebanese people may get unpleasant with the refugees being in their country as civil tension is raising every day, and that may lead to a civil unrest as speaking to foreign media he said "Today, if you go around most of the host communities, there is huge tension between the Lebanese and

[317] "PM Hariri Calls on Brussels Donor Meet,"

[318] "Syrian Refugees in Beirut and Istanbul Detained and Deported*,"* The Guardian, July 29, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/29/syrian-refugees-in-beirut-and-istanbul-detained-and-deported.

[319] "Hariri Warns Syrian Crisis Threatens Lebanese Stability," Asharq AL-Awsat, March 15, 2019, https://english.aawsat.com//home/article/1634881/hariri-warns-syrian-crisis-threatens-lebanese-stability.

[320] "Hariri Warns,".

[321] "PM Hariri Calls on Brussels Donor Meet,".

the Syrians... I fear civil unrest."[322] In this respect, Saad Hariri has forewarned of the Syrian refugee crisis consequences on the stability of Lebanon. After the pressure that the refugees put on the country, Hariri started to mention about the burden of refugees in his rhetoric in international arena. However, he abstained from a negative discourse about the refugees but indicating concerns as the refugees for affecting the economic uncertainty in the country. He stated, "We would like to see an end to this problem, as Syrian refugees are becoming a huge burden on the state, yet we have continued to carry out our humanitarian duty".[323]

Hereby, to ensure that the Lebanese and international community work harmoniously, Hariri advised them to work together with greater emphasis on providing vital humanitarian assistance.[324] In fact, Hariri took the Syrian refugee issue as a reason to the international committee for paying aid annually over five to seven years, where he said that this payment will make sure that the Lebanese economy gets back again.[325] He started to address globally the burden of the refugees on the Lebanese economy. He also stated that the whole world should know that Lebanon is severely impacted by the refugee crisis. In addition to this, Saad Hariri claimed that the issue of the Syrian refugees is extremely affecting Lebanon, the resources are almost demolished, and the labor market is barely functioning.[326] He aimed to benefit from the aid of international donors and collect funds for the vulnerable Lebanese and the refugees in Lebanon by illustrating their burden on the country. He contended that "We are doing a public service for the international community. And the international

[322] "PM Hariri: Lebanon Has Become a Big Refugee Camp," *Al Jazeera*, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/saad-al-hariri-lebanon-big-refugee-camp-170401045951087.html.

[323] Georgi Azar, "Hariri Calls on EU to Exude Pressure on Syria to Return Refugees," *Annahar*, March 14, 2019, https://www.annahar.com/english/article/948326-hariri-calls-on-eu-to-exude-pressure-on-syria-to-return-refugees.

[324] "Hariri Warns,".

[325] "PM Hariri: Lebanon Has Become a Big Refugee Camp," .

[326] "Hariri Warns,".

community should help Lebanon in safeguarding their presence until the day they return to Syria."[327] At the same time, he also alleged that it is very important to increase the help offered to the hosting communities by indicating the number to be at least by 100 million dollars annually to invest in the small infrastructure businesses emphasizing on water and solid garbage management, which has the most effects on human and environmental health. In addition to the support of other businesses such as production, and work on implement of women in the communities and put into effect the development projects within the country.

Furthermore, the desire for the repatriation of Syrian refugees was excessively risen in the political discourse. As these repatriation sentiments have increased among the Lebanese, Saad Hariri insisted on safe and voluntary return of the Syrians. Unlike Gebran Bassil who supported the mass deportation by any means, Saad Hariri claims that the return of the Syrian refugees is essential but their return to their country must be "safe and voluntary".[328] Most of the officials in Lebanon have continued their political campaign and statements against the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, insisting that they should return to their country, considering that Syria became safe under the control of the Syrian regime and its allies over the areas of these refugees. Saad Hariri, with the title of the prime minister of Lebanon of that time, strongly opposes the repatriation of refugees until it is formally declared a safe country by the United Nations. As Gebran Bassil's popular rhetoric for the mass deportation of the refugees was echoed and he run a campaign for their return,[329] Saad Hariri expressed his willingness about the return of the Syrian refugees to their country and applying the Lebanese law on them all, but he stated his refusal on the racist talks towards them, as it leads to grudges and does not return the refugees back. Saad Hariri stated that the

[327] Rachel Martin. "Lebanon's Prime Minister on Help for Syrian Refugees." *Morning Edition,* July 2017. Accessed August 12, 2020.

[328] Mounir Rabih, "'Refugees' Between Hariri and Bassil: An Agreement on Contradiction," *Al Modon*, February, 18, 2019, https://baladi-news.com/ar/articles/46045/-سعد-الحريري-نرغب-بعودة-اللاجئين-السوريين-ونرفض-الخطاب-العنصري-ضدهم.

[329] Jamie Dettmer, "Lebanon's Politicians Want Syrian Refugees to Leave", *Voice of America,* August 27, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/lebanons-politicians-want-syrian-refugees-leave.

position of his government towards the Syrian refugee issue is clear and would not change, underlying that no any Syrian refugee will be forced to return if they do not want to go.[330]

Saad Hariri stated in an interview with the members of press that all political parties of Lebanon agreed on the return of the refugees back to their country, but the main issue is how to return them back. He announced that the Syrian regime president Bashar Assad did not sign the document that ensures the safe and free return of the refugees back.[342] He added to that saying:

> We have tried to communicate with the Syrian government by appointing the general director of the General Directorate of General Security of Lebanon Abbas Ibrahim to discuss the refugees list to return back, yet the Syrian government granted approval to a very small percentage of the listed refugees names that were listed for the return within the framework of 'voluntary repatriation'. [331]

He underlined that *"*the only solution to the Syrian displaced crisis is their safe return to their home country, in accordance with international laws and treaties", and restated the commitment of his government on "working with UNHCR on any pragmatic initiative that ensures the safe return of the displaced Syrians, including the Russian initiative".[332] This initiative was launched by Russia for the return of Syrian Refugees to their country, was the first initiative issued by an international power that target to reach a collaborative action for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Europe and would as a result pave the way for their repatriation.[333] Therefore, Hariri highlighted that the Lebanese government is going to continue its work with the international community to live up to their word by performing the

[330] "Hariri: No Syrian Refugee will be Forced to Return if He Does not Want to,".

[331] Dettmer, "Lebanon's Politicians Want Syrian Refugees to Leave".

[332]"Hariri Warns,".

[333] Rudayna Al-Baalbaky, "Position Paper on Russia's Initiative fort he Return of the Syrian Refugees to Their Country", *AUB Policy Institute,* August 2018, https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/position_papers/2018-2019/20181026_position_paper_russian_initiative_english.pdf .

responsibilities that they declared and to compensate the burden the Syrian emigrants and respect the international protocols with the continuous insistence that the only solution is the return of these individuals to Syria and the complete rejection to their merge in the hosting communities.

Besides all the attempts towards solving the refugee issues in Lebanon, Saad Hariri advocated the Russian initiative which he believed that it is the only serious initiative about the return of the Syrian refugees. In his Presidential statement, Hariri supported and approved the Russian initiatives of returning the displaced Syrians to their countries, as it is the only complete international initiative with clear, complete steps of how the operation will be executed. He also stated that the government will work on reinforcing the connections, between Russia and Lebanon in the refugee's scope, using the security and technical committee. He also mentioned that Lebanon would eagerly work with the Russian government on assuring the safe return to the refugees with the cooperation of the UN. He said that,

> We are extremely happy about the cooperation between the UNHCR and the Russian government which is a step towards the right path. There is an urgent need to different initiatives in this humane cause. We of course encourage any support offered from the international communities in this cause. The fastest solution for the return of the refugees is by providing the refugees with tangent guarantees that the political living, and economical situation in Syria is suitable for their safe returns.[334]

Despite the ambiguity of the Russian initiative, it offered an opportunity for Lebanon to deal with the repatriation of Syrians by adopting a unified national policy instead of factional initiatives. As a result of Hariri's support for the initiative, the internal debate within Lebanese political parties about refugee return has been eased. However, it had no effect on the internal cleavages about the official Lebanese stance of the Syrian regime.[335]

[334] Dettmer, "Lebanon's Politicians Want Syrian Refugees to Leave".

[335] Al-Baalbaky, "Position Paper on Russia's Initiative fort he Return of the Syrian Refugees to Their Country".

The Lebanese political parties mostly supported the return process of the Syrian refugees, but they disagree on how it should be done. Hezbollah and the Christian parties defend the fact that in order to return the refugees back to Syria, they should open negotiations and talks directly with President Assad.[336] Gebran Bassil had previously stated that he will go to Syria to discuss the Syrian refugees return. However, Saad Hariri assured that "if the president of the Free Patriotic Movement Gebran Bassil wanted to visit Syria to discuss the refugee's issues that's his own matter, the outcome is what matters. The Syrian Regime should not consider this visit as a cause to restore the relations." He further affirmed that ''Lebanese-Syrian relations will be non-existent as long as Assad on power.''[337] He continued to state that he does not trust the Syrian regime's will about the return of the refugees, but in case it happens Lebanon would be the first welcomer of the move.

Furthermore, regarding this normalization of the relations between the Syrian regime and Lebanon, Saad Hariri indicated that Lebanon adheres to the disassociation policy and complies with the stance of the Arab League and its resolutions toward the Syrian regime.[338] Hence, Saad Hariri did not believe in collaboration with the Syrian regime to solve the refugee's return issue. He gave the example of Jordan and how it opened its relationships with the Syrian regime, but that did not solve the issue of the refugee's return. Consequently, Hariri argued that there is not any excuse or any justification to restore the relation and coordination with the Syrian regime in order to solve the refugee issues.

In addition, Hariri warned the Lebanese on focusing on the unnecessary repatriation talk of the refugees too much with the fear that Lebanon may be affected by losing the international funds as he indicated in one of his speech;

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[336] Dettmer, "Lebanon's Politicians Want Syrian Refugees to Leave".

[337] Naharnet Newsdesk, "Riachi: LF-FPM Coordinating Efforts, Elections Likely in Sept. Under Proportional System," *Naharnet*, May 2017. https://m.naharnet.com/stories/en/230278-riachi-lf-fpm-coordinating-efforts-elections-likely-in-sept-under-proportional-system.

[338] Mounir Rabih, ""Refugees" Between Hariri and Bassil: An Agreement on Contradiction," *Al Modon*, February, 18, 2019, https://baladi-news.com/ar/articles/46045/-سعد-الحريري-نرغب-بعودة-اللاجئين-السوريين-ونرفض-الخطاب-العنصري-ضدهم.

> With the increasing talks about the return of the Syrian refugees, which we wish that its elements become available as soon as possible. I emphasize on the danger of considering the return already happened or will happen in the near future as this will lead to the disregard of the Syrian refugees' needs in Lebanon, as well as the increasing needs of the hosting communities.[339]

Regarding the repatriation of the Syrians, he believed that the conditions in Syria to return the refugee are not suitable and did not want to collaborate with the Syrian regime in that regard. In other words, he was arguing that the return should be in accordance with the international law and treaties, and he indicated that he respected the international community as he went along their approach for safe and voluntary repatriation. After the increase of public pressure regarding the presence of the Syrians in Lebanon he feared of civil unrest. Saad Hariri called also for the "multiplication of the international efforts to secure the return of the Syrian refugees from Lebanon to their country in a safe and dignified manner."[340] Furthermore, he called for making effort for the repatriation of the displaced Syrians to their country according to the international law and principles and with the procedure that guarantees the sovereignty of the host countries and their laws.[358] Based on their commitment to the international law, he emphasized that they will be working with the United Nations on the Syrian refugees file until the situation is improved in their country.

Hariri did not show a keen interest in taking sides in the Syrian war. However, it could be said that he reacted in line with his political interests as he has so far taken an anti-Syrian regime stance. There have been different interpretations by the scholars regarding the stance of Saad Hariri towards the Syrian refugees, mainly sectarian and political. It is argued by some that because the refugees are mainly Sunni Muslims and oppose Saad Hariri's political antagonist, he tried to be committed to the Syrian refugees.

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[339] "Hariri, launched the crisis response plan in 2019: for the continuation of humanitarian and development assistance*" Lebanese Ministry of Information*, accessed, November 22, 2021, https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/31962

[340] Hariri Warns,".

4.2 Walid Jumblatt

Walid Jumblatt is another influential politician that is considerable to be examined in the context of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. He is a veteran Lebanese politician, a former member of the Lebanese Parliament, and the current leader of the Progressive Socialist Party since 1977, that belongs to the Druze community. This section will provide a brief information about Walid Jumblatt and a background on his political party Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), by addressing the turning point in the life of Jumblatt that will assist to understand Jumblatt's position in the Lebanese politics,[341] alongside with the different eras that the PSP has witnessed and the side that they adopted. Following, an analysis of Jumblatt's statements regarding the Syrian refugees in Lebanon was illustrated.

After the assassination of his father, Kamal Jumblatt, one of the founders of the Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblatt was forced to accept the leadership of the party. Progressive Socialist Party was founded with the notion of constructing a new system based on principles of secularism, socialism, Arabism, and the dissolving of the sectarian system. The top priority of the party is achieving a secular state and reconstituting the administrative districts. The Progressive Socialist Party opposed the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.[342] Prior to Jumblatt's leadership of the PSP, he worked as reporter of the An Nahar newspaper. He joined the PSP as a member. Later, he had shown a significant contribution to the party participated in its political programs. After taking over of the party, Jumblatt appeared to be politically weak due to the lack of political conformism to the party, which led most of the other political communities to weaken and try to take over his party.[343]

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[341] "Jumblatt: No Solution in Syria with Assad in Power", Al-Monitor, December 10, 2014, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2014/12/lebanon-walid-jumblatt-druze-syria-al-nusra.html?fbclid=IwAR2Ag0g5oJ2gLEo3lixahM0mNKyZe9ndtI6CkeWSbxYLCd7lReU0ajBgn4w.

[342] "Lebanon", European Forum, last updated December 2021, https://www.europeanforum.net/countries/lebanon.

[343] Grayc Gambill and Daniel Nassif. "Walid Jumblatt: Head of the Progressive Socialist Party." *Middle East Intelligence* Bulletin 3, no. 5, May 2001, https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0105_ld1.htm.

Jumblatt's weak political position in Lebanon was the start of his dynamic and changeable policy towards his allies in the region. The next section will summarize the different stages that Jumblatt and his party adopted from 1977 till 2005 with the Syrian regime.

After taking over the PSP leadership, Syrian regime was one of the sides that tried to weaken Jumblatt and take over his party. To maintain his position in the party and to overcome the negative voices within the party, Jumblatt had to meet the previous Syrian president Hafiz Al Assad, who managed to enrich Jumblatt's power inside Lebanon. The core outcome of this meeting was the support of Syrian regime to Jumblatt in 1982. After the invasion and occupation of Lebanon in 1982, Jumblatt called for help from Syria which responded positively to save the Druze community and displace the Christian Lebanese Forces (CLF), which was an ally of Israel, from the Druze areas.

Throughout his ruling period, Hafiz Al Assad was giving all the support to Jumblatt and made sure that he has a permanent part of the Lebanese parliament. After the death of Hafez Al Assad, Jumblatt started calling for withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon. However, after Bashar Al Assad, the son of Hafez Al Assad, took the control of Syria, he started stripping away Jumblatt's power. These actions, and the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in 2005, left Jumblatt with no other option but to join the anti-Syrian regime opposition.[344]

By March 2011, when the conflict erupted in Syria, Walid Jumblatt who had been vocally against the Syrian regime, initially criticized the uprising and identified it as external powers' conspiracy to divide Syria.[345] From his perspective, the crisis in Syria posed threat to one of his prior concern which is the surviaval of his community both in Syria and Lebanon.[346] However, when the uprsing became a part of the

[344] Gambill and Nassif. "Walid Jumblatt: Head of the Progressive Socialist Party.".

[345] Tınas & Tür "Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions".

[346] Tınas & Tür "Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions".

Lebanese domestic politics, he instantly changed his stance against the Syrian regime and called for the immediate political reform in Syria.

Consequently, He supported the Syrian rebels and became one of the believers in the rights of freedom for Syrian people disregarding their ethnic or religious backgrounds. When the influx of displaced Syrians to Lebanon started, he took a moderate position towards the Syrian refugees and started to defend their rights publicly and internationally.[347] He consistently spoken favor of welcoming the incoming Syrian refugees and hosting them in Lebanon. Hence, given a brief account of the context, a detailed study of Jumblatt's positions and views regarding the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon was investigated through his interviews and his statements that he shared on his personal Twitter account.

As Jumblatt started to support and promote the rights of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, he also began to encourage the Syrians in Assad's military to leave their positions in the hope of ending the crises.[366]

Jumblatt has been asked several times during the interviews about his position towards the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and about repatriation of Syrians to their home country, but he was always rejecting this idea as long as the Assad regime was in power. This is because he alleged that he feared to return the Syrian refugees under the power of the same person that caused the entire crise.[348] Jumblatt argued that sending back the refugees with no guarantee of their safety against torture and death would not be acceptable. He even added in one of his interviews that "It is impossible for the masses [of refugees] to return home while the Syrian regime refuses to receive them,"[376] implying the danger those refugees will be subjected to as the Syrian regime will not accept them again in their homeland. Even when Jumblatt was asked about

[347] Makram Rabah, "Walid Jumblatt, Last Man Standing", *The Arab Weekly,* August 3, 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/walid-jumblatt-last-man-standing.

[348] Maımaıtımıng Yılıxıatı, "Assad Prevents Syrians in Lebanon from Returning Home," *Anadolu Agency,* March 18, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/assad-prevents-syrians-in-lebanon-from-returning-home/1422036.

the solution to the Syrian crisis, he explicitly said that "given the blood that has been tided, this crisis has no solution with Bashar Al-Assad still in charge".[349]

In addition, Jumblatt shared a number of tweets in which he sympathized with the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. One of these tweets was shared on the occasion of Eid, where he expresses his sympathy toward those who are celebrating Eid outside their country and criticized the efforts of the Lebanese government to return the Syrian refugees to their countries. Jumblatt stated that "As for the displaced people in the land, there is no feast or rest for them. Death chases them in the seas and in the deserts, human traffickers, fleeing from injustice and wars for a better life, so the walls of hatred and racism rise everywhere."[350] And he continued, "In Lebanon, they demand that they (the refugees) be handed over to the executioner, under the pretext of making them bear the worst conditions, and our misfortune is in a failed era from the first moment.".[370] In another tweet, Jumblatt was sending a message to the voices on the anti-refugee advocators to stop incitement against the Syrian refugees,[351], referring to both Hassan Nasrallah and Gebran Bassil, who were always in favor of sending the refugees back to Syria.[352]

Even when thousands of tweets in the context of hatred toward Syrian refugees in Lebanon were gathered and analyzed in 2019, the Progressive Socialist Party in Lebanon was one of the figures that showed supports and sympathy towards the Syrian refugees.[372] (See figure 6)

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[349] "A Long Road Ahead for Syria Says Lebanese Politician Walid Jumblatt," Euronews, December 1, 2015, https://www.euronews.com/2015/12/01/a-long-road-ahead-for-syria-says-lebanese-politician-walid-jumblatt.

[350] "Jumblatt's tweet about Syrian refugees sparks criticism in Lebanon", *Enab Baladi*, June 15, 2018, https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/235327.

[351] "Stop The İncitement Against The Syrian Refugee And Reconsider The Growth Theory And The World Bank's Meta-Prescriptions," Twitter, accessed February 2, 2022, https://twitter.com/walidjoumblatt/status/895930772661690368.

[352] "Analysis of Tweets Showcases Hatred towards Syrian Refugees among Lebanon's Elite," *InfoTimes*, September 15, 2019, https://infotimes.org/analysis-of-tweets-showcases-hatred-among-lebanons-elite-towards-syrian-refugees/?fbclid=IwAR0hAfXrCjY19jVHz8JIp9kfLjamaJRl5YI2NuD13sILbvkulE1pNKahzDI.

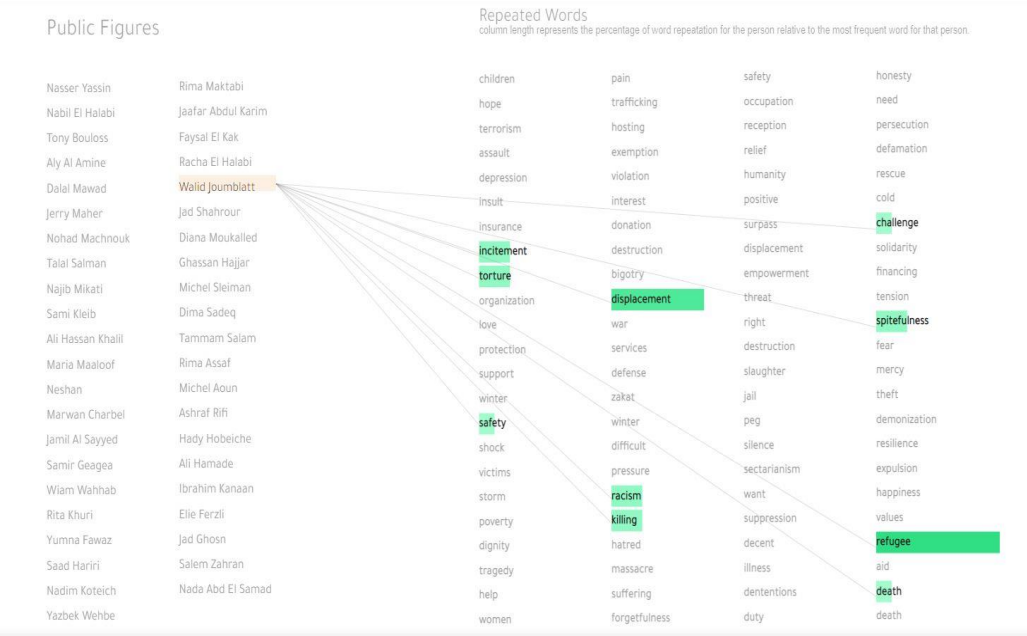


Figure 4. 1 Analysis of Walid Jumblatt tweets[353]

With the support of Syrians, Jumblatt started to gain the respect of the Syrians from different categories in the society. A large group of Syrian politicians and cultural figures showed their respect to Jumblatt throughout publishing a statement signed by several hundred writers, journalists, politicians, and defected military figures praising Jumblatt's effort in protecting the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Jumblatt's position and effort were praised in protecting Syrian refugees in Lebanon preventing their repatriation. The core of the statement could be summarized in the following quote:

> He had supported in all possible forms the hopes and aspirations of the Syrian people and had worked to bring together the words of Syrians, both openly and secretly, to release their families and those who had been arrested and

[353] "Analysis of Tweets Showcases Hatred towards Syrian Refugees among Lebanon's Elite," InfoTimes, September 15, 2019, https://infotimes.org/analysis-of-tweets-showcases-hatred-among-lebanons-elite-towards-syrian-refugees/?fbclid=IwAR0hAfXrCjY19jVHz8JIp9kfLjamaJRl5YI2NuD13sILbvkulE1pNKahzDI.

abducted. The whole time, he was ambassador to free Syrians, representing them in international forums, without a fuss or with overstep.[354]

In December 2020, when a Syrian refugee camp in North Lebanon was burned,[355] Jumblatt expressed solidarity with the refugees. Not only that, but Jumblatt also took the chance and replied to the provocative statements by Gebran Bassil against the Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Bassil is considered to be number one public figure in Lebanon that promotes the flagrant hatred against the Syrian refugees in Lebanon according to a study done using one thousand of his tweets in 2019.[356] Jumblatt criticized the political influential like Bassil and Nasrallah's attitudes against the presence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and their flagrant hatred speech toward them, is that the hatred speech of these politicians against the Syrian refugees could be considered as the fuel that burns the Syrians refugees camp in 2019 and continues to create the discriminations against them till today. From Jumblatt's point of view, this discrimination against the Syrian refugees can be finished by stopping the incitement against the Syrian refugee.[357] Bakli, a Lebanese journalist, stated that the Syrian crises, even after years, are still abetting the refugees "to seek safety or to escape a tribal history of political discourse".[358]

To better understand the position of Jumblatt regarding the Syrian refugees, it is important also to take into consideration the period that Lebanon suffered during

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[354] "Syrian Elite Expresses Solidarity with Walid Jumblatt," The Syrian Observer, February 11, 2019, https://syrianobserver.com/features/48509/syrian-elite-expresses-solidarity-with-walid-jumblatt.html.

[355] "Syrian Refugee Camp Burned to Ground in Northern Lebanon," *Deutsche Welle*, December 27, 2020," https://www.dw.com/en/syrian-refugee-camp-burned-to-ground-in-northern-lebanon/a-56068640.

[356] "Analysis of Tweets," .

[357] "Stop the incitement against the Syrian refugee and reconsider the growth theory and the World Bank's meta-prescriptions," Twitter, n.d., https://twitter.com/walidjoumblatt/status/895930772661690368.

[358] Serene Abdul Baki, "Lebanon: Eviction, Discrimination and Syrian Refugees," *Habitat International Coalition,* May 17, 2019, http://www.hic-mena.org/activitydetails.php?id=pm9rZA==#.YfqsfPnP2M_ .

Syria's custodianship. [378] As Jumblatt's policy takes an anti-Syrian direction, it is allged that his position in protecting the Syrian refugees as a chance of taking down a regime that was regarded as detrimental to Lebanon.[359] Further, it is claimed that Jumblatt is trying to bring down a regime that is also accused in assassinating his father.[360] In other words, from Jumblatt's perspective, it happened that defending the Syrian refugees in Lebanon means a hope to eliminate an old enemy.

[359] Khaled Oweis, "Syrian Regime Allies Sharpen Their Knives for Druze Leader Walid Joumblatt," *The National*, July 21, 2019, https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/syrian-regime-allies-sharpen-their-knives-for-druze-leader-walid-joumblatt-1.885309.

[360] Lamis Andoni, "Walid Jumblatt: Kingmaker," *Al Jazeera*, January 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2011/1/22/walid-jumblatt-kingmaker.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

After a decade of conflict, the Syrian refugee crisis continues to exist as a significant global issue, with extremely large numbers of displaced Syrian people searching for refuge abroad.[361] Obviously, the refugee crisis accompanied with the conflict in Syria lays an excessive burden and responsibility on the neighboring host countries, which have struggled in handling it until recently. The response to refugee influx in the host states continues to present a complicated picture, given the variations in time and place.

The debates on how to respond to and manage the refugee crisis became a hot-topic for political actors in the host states. As Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita, all the while going through an unprecedented political, financial, and socio-economic crisis, the debates and discourses about Syrian refugees in Lebanon became even more important. As Lebanon lacks a national framework to regulate the refugee crisis and faced a deadlock in terms of its response, it is important to investigate the dynamics behind the deadlock. Therefore, Lebanon's domestic politics could do with an in-depth analysis if one is to better understand the processes and causes bringing about the impasse in the governance of refugees. Various factors affect the attitudes towards the presence of the Syrians in Lebanon. This study, in turn, focuses on the connection between the fragmented politics of the country and the political interests its leaders, with reference to their discourse towards the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

The long-term stay of a significant number of Syrians in Lebanon for more than a decade brought about concerns in Lebanese social and political life. The Syrian

[361] IOM, "World Migration Report 2020"

refugees certainly have an important place in the discourse of leading political actors. It is observed that the discourse on the Syrian refugees runs closely parallel to the lines of fragmentation of internal politics of Lebanon, a country known for its fragile political structures based on sectarian arrangements. As the political order is based on confessional divisions, the institutional structures of the Lebanese state are weak and mostly dominated by sectarian affiliation.[362] The failure of the disassociation policy allowed the political leaders to express and impose their own interpretations of the presence of Syrian refugees. Ultimately, the Syrian refugees were left without a well-defined and consistent policy or a legal or administrative framework.[363] In the light of the foregoing, Lebanon's two main political blocs (March 8 and 14) which assembled around the position of Syria in Lebanon, and which had a substantial role in shaping Lebanese politics for a long time, have also influenced and complicated the response to the Syrian refugee crisis.[364]

This study provides an academic discussion on how Lebanese political leaders have perceived the Syrian refugee crisis, and how they have formulated their interests and actions in response. To do so, the analysis focused on Lebanese political leaders' discourses regarding the Syrian refugees, since the study assumed that the role of the divided and fractious politics of Lebanon and the discursive construction of the political leaders reveal key aspects of the governance perspective and attitudes towards the Syrian refugees. Consequently, this study argues that the local politics turned to be a decisive factor in shaping refugee policies. In this context, the perceptions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are mostly functions of narrow local politics as a field of contention between two camps comprised of the March 8 bloc supporting close ties with the Syrian regime and the March 14 bloc advocating the emancipation of Lebanon from the dominance of the Syrian regime. Some scholars claim that the blocs are no longer relevant as the blocs themselves are divided on many issues, shaking alliances

[362] Tınas and Tür, "Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions,"

[363] Geha and Talhouk "Politics and the Plight of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon"

[364] Geha and Talhouk "Politics and the Plight of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon"

they constitute. Yet this study shows that these two blocs had a revival following the Syrian conflict that started in 2011 and the associated refugee crisis, and that they continue to define Lebanese politics.

To analyze the relevance of the March 8 and 14 blocs in the context of Syrian refugees, this thesis examined the discourse of four key political leaders who have important roles in the two blocs, and who delved rather deeply into refugee issues in their speeches and remarks. The analysis provided in chapters 3 and 4 focused on the relations of the political leaders with the Syrian regime, and their positions regarding the ongoing Syrian conflict and the Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Domestic politics in general and the political interests and concerns of political leaders in particular affected the framing of the refugee context. The political relations between the Syrian government and the Lebanese political parties have been an important factor in shaping the political environment.[365] The discourse analysis showed how the refugee issue has been politicized in the Lebanese political debate, and how it was influenced by the domestic factors of the country, such as the sectarian lines of division, and the bilateral relations of subnational actors with the Syrian regime.

The advocates of stopping the entry of refugees, blame them for the economic deterioration, insist on their repatriation, and dwell on the threats posed by their presence in the country. This group is mostly comprised of political actors that belong to the March 8 bloc, which is virtually allied with the Assad regime. The arguments in these discourses were mostly characterized by rhetoric that stressed the threat of refugees on the demographic balance, the limited capacity of the country to sustain the refugees, and the societal cost of refugees. Their most common emphasis was on the necessity of adopting extraordinary measures to return the Syrian refugees to Syria, as they deemed the latter country to be safe under the control of the Assad regime. This camp uses frequent references to the security and well-being of Lebanon and its citizens to justify the measures they propose. On the other hand, the arguments that

[365] Jeremy Jones, "Negotiating Change: The New Politics of Middle East," (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 88

are welcoming towards the refugees in the country are mostly voiced by the elements of the March 14 bloc, which opposes the Assad regime, and supports the Syrian opposition.

The political system and political leaders have a substantial influence on the situation of refugees in host countries. Refugee governance is mostly shaped by political actors who commonly embrace their own partisan interests and motivations.[366] For example, as Syrian refugees' presence in Lebanon provided fuel for conflicting perspectives regarding the return of refugees, the matter of repatriation is perceived by two major political blocs in Lebanon in a contradicting manner that envelopes essential differences in political attitudes towards ties with the Syrian regime. Intrinsically, the concept of return is established by the international community to encompass safe, sustainable, and voluntary repatriation of displaced individuals, dynamically including coordination between the country hosting displaced individuals, their country of origin, and the international agencies. Contextualizing such a framework into the Lebanese scene, one cannot help but note that the political leaders who adhere to the March 8 and to the March 14 blocs have differed in terms of their understanding of a number of concepts including voluntariness, sustainability and safety, based on the opposition of the latter bloc, and the support afforded by the former to the Syrian regime.

Gebran Bassil and Hassan Nasrallah, who are regarded as prominent supporters of the Syrian regime, defined the concept of return distinctly by calling for normalization of the political ties between the Lebanese government and the Syrian regime, allowing for coordination between the two countries.[367] Accordingly, their view of the return norms is based on their perception of the Syrian political scene, deeming the Syrian regime as the most capable entity in terms of offering rather safe return for the displaced individuals.[368] As such, their definition of return norms

[366] Geha, "Political Complexities of Return: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon",

[367] Fakhoury "Refugee return and fragmented governance in the host state.".

[368] Fakhoury "Refugee return and fragmented governance in the host state.".

contains conflating the concept of voluntary return into the concept of safety. Both Gebran Bassil and Hassan Nasrallah argued that the national return norm regarding voluntariness encourages permanent stay of refugees, and instead opted to refer solely to safety as they sought a durable solution for repatriation. The argument followed with the claim of regime-held areas to be safe for proper repatriation, along with the areas where ceasefires are in place. Calling for the coordination with the Syrian regime, they called for rechanneling the international aid for displaced Syrians to arranging their safe return, referring to the current funding structures as settlement-encouraging.

In contrast, Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt had drastically different views of the return norms. Being highly opposed to the Syrian regime, they refused all sorts of arguments calling for normalizing ties with the Syrian regime in the absence of a substantial political solution in Syria. They argue that the Syrian regime's ability to provide favorable conditions for safe return is questionable at best. Additionally, they support compliance with international policies referring to the essentiality of beholding the international framework of repatriation in any potential return scenario. In their view, compliance with the international framework focuses on the ultimate goal of achieving voluntary return, which cannot be accomplished without a solid political solution in Syria. Finally, in contrast to Bassil and Nasrallah, they view the current fund channeling structure as a commendable one, but in need of reinforcement in order to support the displaced individuals and their hosting communities.

As the Lebanese case makes it clear, the response to refugees' presence is often politicized. In other words, the polarized political environment in Lebanon have shaped the response to the Syrian refugees. It could be said that the way the politicians constructed and represented the issue in alignment with their political interests. The political actors in Lebanon have often articulated their discourse influenced, to a great extent, by their political views, in the context of the political debates during the refugee crisis. Obviously, the speeches of the leaders from the March 8 bloc (Bassil/Nasrallah) represented by far the most discriminative and exclusionary discourse that embodied an anti-refugee ideology, presenting the refugees as an existential threat to the country and society. On the other side of the political spectrum, political leaders (Hariri/Jumblatt) mainly walked along humanitarian lines of discourse, highlighting

international human rights. Consequently, they focus on humanitarian aspects of the refugee problem, and expressed more solidarity with them, rather than associating them with a threat. It could be argued that the different discourses embraced by the key political leaders of the two blocs demonstrated the role of anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian perspectives in shaping the attitudes towards Syrian refugees. It is also shown that the political leaders' interpretation of the Syrian refugee crisis is mainly guided by their political objectives. For instance, Walid Jumblatt who had been vocally against the Syrian regime, at the outset of the Syrian conflict he criticized the uprising and identified it as external powers' conspiracy to weaken Syria. However, when the uprsing became a part of the Lebanese domestic politics, he directly changed his stance against the Syrian regime and called for the immediate political reform in Syria. İnitiallay, when the conflict erupted in Syria the concerns of Jumblatt was the surviaval of his community both in Syria and Lebanon.[369] Yet, when the conflict in Syria became to affect the internal politics of Lebanon which revolve around issues such as sectarian differences, regional alliances and the political divergences, Jumblatt reoriented his his position with concerns over his interets in the domestic politics.

It is also worth mentioning that the different positions towards the Syrian regime have revealed divisions even among the Christian parties on how to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis.[370] The Lebanese Forces Party (LFP) and the Kataeb Party which ally with the March 14 bloc are known by their opposition to the Syrian regime, as well as to the existence of Hezbollah as an armed force outside the control of the state.[371] Unlike FPM, these two Christian parties have voiced their support for the uprising in Syria. In addition, they rejected the measures designed to prevent the entry of Syrian refugees to Lebanon. In that regard, Lebanon's Christian parties also have

[369] Tınas & Tür "Lebanon and the Syrian Civil War: Sectarian Perceptions and Positions"

[370] Kai Kverme, "The Syrian Crisis has Revealed The Far-Reaching And Fundamental Disagreements among Lebanon's Christian parties*", Carnegie Middle East Centre,* February 14, 2013, https://carnegie-mec.org/sada/50945

[371] Kverme, "The Syrian Crisis,".

faced deep and fundamental divisions because of their different stands towards the Syrian regime, and their thoughts on how to deal with refugee issue.

To conclude, the 21st century is facing with unprecedented increase in the number of displaced people and refugees all around the globe, not to mention the legal and operational shortcomings of the refugee regimes in place. Against this background, this study aimed to assess the role of the polarized internal political environment in terms of its influencing on the refugee governance. In the absence of a national policy to regulate the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the polarized divide that dominate the politics of Lebanon since 2005 as pro- and anti-Syrian regime camps continued to be a key determinant in shaping the future of the Syrian refugees. Drawing on insights from the role of the fragmented politics in Lebanon, one can safely assume that the country has been facing a deadlock regarding the refugee governance as various political figures have continued to frame the issue in wildly different ways, as the discourse analysis provided here shows.

In sum, the refugee policy and regime in place in a host country is a function of not only its limited resources, but also its internal politics which revolve around issues such as sectarian differences, regional alliances and the political divergences. Domestic political factors and struggles prevailing in host countries provide the main lenses through which the refugees are perceived.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Suriye'de 10 yılı aşkın süredir devam etmekte olan ihtilafın trajik sonuçlarından bir tanesi de başta komşu ülkeler olmak üzere uluslararası toplumu bir bütün olarak etkileyen mülteci krizidir. Türkiye, Ürdün ve Lübnan, Suriyeli mülteci akınına en çok maruz kalan ülkeler olmuştur. Bunların arasında Lübnan ise, Suriye'ye komşu olması ve karmaşık bir siyasi yapıya sahip olmasının yanı sıra, yüzölçümü bakımından oldukça ufak bir ülke olmasıyla beraber, kişi başına düşen Suriyeli mülteci sayısında ilk sırada yer alıp, nüfus ve yüzölçümü indeksine göre en fazla mülteci barındıran ülke konumundadır. Kırılgan bir ekonomik, sosyal ve politik yapıya sahip olan Lübnan, her geçen gün derinleşen ekonomik ve mali krizle beraber, Covid-19 salgını, Beyrut limanında meydana gelen patlama ve akabinde ortaya çıkan hükümet krizi sonucunda adeta çöküş sarmalına girmiş ve "failed state" (başarısız devlet) olmanın eşiğine gelmişken, çok sayıda mültecinin gelişinden de büyük ölçüde olumsuz anlamda etkilenmiştir. Lübnan, mültecilerin gelişiyle altyapısal anlamda zorluklar yaşamaya başlamıştır. Suriyeli mülteciler ve Suriye krizi Lübnan ekonomisi üzerine ağır bir yük oluşturmuştur. Sonuç olarak, tarihinin en derin siyasi, ekonomik, mali ve sosyal krizler yumağının içinden geçen Lübnan'da, mülteci krizi ülkenin siyasi gündeminin en önemli konularından biri haline gelmiştir.

Lübanan, Suriyeli sığınmacıların ülkeye gelişiyle "açık kapı politikası" uygulamıştır. Ancak sonraki yıllarda mülteci sorunu, ülkeyi insani yükümlülükleri ile siyasi ve ekonomik çıkarları arasında bir denge oluşturmaya zorlamıştır. Lübnan, hem toplumsal yapısı, hem anayasal sistemi hem de kutuplaşmış siyasi ortamı açısından çok sayıda sığınmacının ülkeye gelişiyle oldukça karmaşık bir hale bürünmüştür. Öte yandan, silahlı çatışma, siyasal şiddet ve savaştan kaçan, aynı zamanda uluslararası korumadan yoksun olan Suriyeli sığınmacılar, Lübnan'ın 1951 tarihli Mültecilerin Hukuki Statüsüne İlişkin Cenevre Sözleşmesi ve 1967 tarihli Protokol'e taraf olmaması sebebiyle de sorun teşkil etmiş, hukuki statüden ve hukuki haklardan yoksun bir şekilde varlıklarını sürdürmeye çalışmışlardır. Nüfus ve yüzölçümü endeksine göre

en fazla mülteciye sahip olmasıyla beraber, Lübnan'ın mülteci krizini ulusal bir çerçevede yönetecek politikası olmadığından ve krizi yönetmek açısından bir çıkmazla karşı karşıya olduğundan, bu durumun temelindeki faktörleri araştırmak önem taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle, Lübnan'ın karşı karşıya kaldığı mülteci akınının yönetiminde çıkmaza neden olan süreç ve nedenleri araştırmak için Lübnan'ın iç siyasetindeki dinamikleri ele almıştır bu tez. Lübnan'ın ülkedeki Suriyeli mültecilerin varlığına yönelik tutumları çeşitli faktörler etkilemektedir. Bu çalışma da, devam eden Suriye mülteci krizine yönelik bazı liderlerin söylemlerine atıfta bulunarak, ülkenin bölünmüş siyaseti ile liderlerinin siyasi çıkarları arasındaki bağlantıya odaklanmaktadır.

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın ardından, 24 Nisan 1920 tarihinde toplanan San Remo Konferansı'nda alınan kararlar doğrultusunda Fransız Mandası altına giren Lübnan, tarihi bir miras olarak bünyesinde barındırdığı farklı inançlara sahip ve çok kültürlü toplumsal yapısından zamanla mustarip olmaya başlamıştır. Lübnan'da, resmi makamlarca 18 farklı dini-mezhepsel topluluğun bir arada yaşadığı kabul edilmektedir. Hristiyanlık inancına bağlı mezhepler; Maruniler, Rum Ortodokslar, Ermeni Apolistikler, Rum Melkani Katolikler, Romalı Katolikler, Kıptiler, Suriyeli Ortodokslar, Ermeni Ortodokslar olarak tanımlanırken, İslam inancına bağlı mezhepler ise Sünniler ve Şiiler'den oluşmaktadır. Şii mezhebinden neşet etmiş olmasına rağmen bazıları tarafından ayrı bir inanç olarak tanımlanan Dürziler de Lübnan'daki önemli topluluklardan biridir ve Yahudiler de Lübnan'da yer alan bir diğer önemli topluluktur. Esasen, 1926 yılından itibaren tesis edilen ve en son 1932 yılında gerçekleştirilen resmi nüfus sayımını esas alan dini-mezhepsel arka plana dayalı siyasi yapı da yukarıda zikredilen toplulukların demokratik temsillerini büyük ölçüde etkilemiştir. Öyle ki, 1943 yılında Lübnan'ın bağımsızlığını ilan ettiği ve toplumsal uzlaşıyı mutabık hale getirdiği Lübnan Ulusal Paktı dahi, en son 1932 yılında gerçekleştirilen resmi nüfus sayımını esas alan dini-mezhepsel arka plana dayalı siyasi yapıyı birkaç değişiklik yapmak suretiyle korumuştur. Bugün dahi varlığını sürdürmekte olan ve Lübnan siyasal hayatının bölünmüş yapısına tarihi bir derinlik katan bu siyasal yapı, doğal olarak, toplumsal kırılmaları ve kamplaşmaları da beraberinde getirmiş, Lübnan siyasal hayatının politika yapıcı yönünü zaman

içerisinde köreltmiş ve mülteci krizi gibi spesifik konularda belirli bir politika izlenmesinin önünü kesmiştir.

Dini-mezhepsel dinamiklerin bu denli yoğun ve etkin olduğu Lübnan'da, anayasal yapıya göre Cumhurbaşkanı Maruni, Başbakan Sünni ve Parlamento Sözcüsü ise Şii olmalıydı. Zamanla güç mücadelelerine ve iç-dış aktörlerin etkisine de tanık olan Lübnan, çeşitli dini-mezhepsel gruplara entegre silahlı grupların, Suriye ve İran gibi ülkelerin askeri güçlerinin varlığının da etkisiyle 1975-1990 yılları arasını acı bir iç savaş tecrübesi ile geçirmiştir. Bu acı tecrübenin ardından 2000'lere doğru, normalleşme sürecine giren Lübnan'da ekonomik, toplumsal, sosyal ve siyasal beklentiler de olumlu seyretmiştir. Fakat, Lübnan Başbakanı Refik Hariri'nin 2005 yılında suikast sonucu öldürülmesi halihazırda Lübnan'da var olan siyasi, toplumsal ve ekonomik kırılganlığı iyice derinleştirmiştir. Suikastın akabinde, Lübnan'da çeşitli sokak hareketleri gözlemlenmeye başlanmıştır. Sedir Devrimi (Cedar Revolution) olarak adlandırılan bu gösterilere müteakip, Suriye'nin Hariri suikastinden sorumlu tutulmasıyla uzun bir süredir tartışılagelen Suriye rejiminin Lübnan'daki askeri varlığı da yüksek sesle sorgulanır olmuş ve en nihayetinde Suriye rejiminin Lübnan'dan çekilmesine kadar yaşanacak süreci başlatmıştır. Bu gösterileri, Suriye rejimi ile ilişkilere ve Suriye'nin Lübnan'a katkılarına olumlu çerçeveden bakan 8 Mart bloğunun gösterileri takip etmiştir. Akabinde, Hariri suikastı başta olmak üzere, Lübnan'da yaşanan istikrarsızlığı ve kargaşayı Suriye rejiminin Lübnan üzerindeki aktif etkisi üzerinden okuyan, Suriye ile olan sınırların net olarak belirlenmesini talep eden, Suriye rejiminin Lübnan'daki etkisini ve 30 yıldır süregelen askeri varlığının sonlandırılması gerektiğini savunan 14 Mart bloğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Suriye politikasına karşın oluşturulmuş bu koalisyonlar Lübnan politikasında uzun süre etkili olmuştur.

Eski Lübnan Başbakanı Refik Hariri'nin 14 Şubat 2005 yılında bir suikast sonucunda öldürülmesinden bu yana Suriye yanlısı "8 Mart" ve Suriye karşıtı "14 Mart" koalisyonlarının oluşması ülkede yaşanan çoğu gerginliğin ve siyasi kilitlenmelerin arka palanını oluşturmuştur. Lübnan politikasında etkili olan bu iki bloğun Suriye politikası üzerine şekillenmesinin nedeni Suriye rejiminin suikasttan sorumlu olarak gösterilmiş olmasıdır. Refik Hariri'nin Lübnan ulusal kimliğinin yaratılması ve egemenliğin yeniden tesis edilmesinin amacı doğrultusunda, 1976'dan

beri Lübnan'da varlığını sürdüren Suriye ordusunun ülkeden çıkarılması gerektiğini savunmakta ve bu yönde politika izlemekteydi. Lübnan'daki Suriye varlığının sona ermesine yönelik uluslararası kamuoyunda da etkinliğini artırıp 2004 yılında Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyinin, Lübnan'da bulunan yabancı güçlerin çıkarılmasına ilişkin almış olduğu 1559 sayılı karar ile, Suriye karşıtı söylemlerini güçlendirmiş ve uluslararası baskıyı artırmıştır. Haririn bir suikast sonucunda öldürülmesi ülkedeki Suriye karşıtlığını arttırdı ve Suriye'nin Lübnan'dan çıkması için geniş çaplı gösteriler gerçekleşmişti. Artan iç ve dış baskılar dolayısıyla Suriye'nin Lübnan topraklarından çıkmak zorunda bırakılması, Lübnan siyasetinin geleceğini "8 Mart İttifakı" ve "14 Mart İttifakı" olarak bilinen iki blok tarafından şekillenmiştir.

Ancak zamanla bu iki koalisyonda geçişler ve dağılmalar olmuş ve birçok konuda etkinliği kalmamıştır. Suriye İç Savaşı'nın patlak vermesiyle, bu iki bloğa mensup olan liderler arasında Suriye rejiminin geleceğine ilişkin endişe, beklenti ve söylemlerinde farklılık gözlemlenmiştir. Öyle ki, 8 Mart bloğuna mensup olan politikacılar Esad idaresindeki Suriye rejiminin devamını desteklerken, aynı bloğun içerisinde yer alan İran destekli Hizbullah da zaman zaman Suriye İç Savaşı'nda Suriye rejiminden yana aktif rol üstlenmiştir. Öte yandan, 14 Mart bloğuna mensup olan liderler ise Esad rejiminin Suriye'de sona ermesini dileyen tarafta olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Her iki grubun Suriyeli mültecilere bakışları da Suriye rejimine bakışları ile paralellik taşımakla birlikte, politika yapım süreçlerinde ise daha ziyade belirsiz bir görüntü çizmiştir. Bu tez, zaman içinde bu bloklar içiersindeki uyuşmazlıklar ve geçişkenlikler olmasına rağmen, bu kutuplaşmış bölünmenin Lübnan'a Suriyeli mülteci akını ile yeniden canlandığını savunuyor.

Bu çalışmada Lübnan'daki Suriye mülteci konusunu en çok gündeme getiren liderler arasında 4 lider seçilmiştir. Ele alınan siyasi aktörleri genel çerçevede ele alacak olursak; eski Lübnan Dışişleri ve Göç Bakanı ve Özgür Yurtsever Hareketi lideri Cibran Basil ile Hizbullah Genel Sekreteri ve Şii toplumu temsilcisi Seyid Hasan Nasrallah, 8 Mart bloğunun içerisinde konumlandırılmakta, bu liderler Suriye rejimini desteklemekte ve Suriyeli mültecilerin ülkelerine dönmesi gerektiğini savunmakta iken, eski Lübnan Başbakanı, Gelecek Hareketi lideri ve Sünni toplumu temsilcisi Saad Hariri ile İlerici Sosyalist Partisi lideri ve Dürzi toplumu temsilcisi Velid Canbolat ise, 14 Mart bloğunun içerisinde konumlandırılmakta, ve bu liderler bu

süreçte Suriye rejiminin değişmesini destekleyen ve Suriyeli mültecilere sempati duyan söylemlerle gündeme gelmiştir.

Suriye Savaşının başlamasıyla, Lübnan'daki tüm siyasi partilerin bölgesel ihtilaflara taraf olmama politikasına (Dissociation Policy) bağlı kalmaları için çağrıda bulunulmuştur. Lübnan'da tüm siyasi tarafların 2012 yılında üzerinde anlaştıkları Baabda Deklarasyonuna göre siyasi taraflar, Lübnan'ın başka ülkelerin meselelerine müdahil olmama ve tarafsız davranma konusunda taahhütte bulunmuşlardır. Buradaki asıl amaç Lübnan'ın Suriye'deki savaşa müdahil olmasını engellemek ve tüm siyasi tarafların taahhütlerini yerine getirmelerini sağlamaktır. Baabda Deklarasyonuna rağmen Hizbullah'ın, Suriye İç Savaşına aktif destek vermesi ve çatışmalarda yer alması, 8 ve 14 Mart Hareketleri arasındaki gerilimi tırmandırdığı gibi Lübnan'da çatışma ve bombalı eylemlerin gerçekleştirilmesine neden olduğu iddia edilmiştir. Bu tez, Suriyeli mültecilerle ilgili olarak iki blok arasındaki farklılıkların izini sürmek amacıyla dört siyasi liderin söylemini analiz etmiştir.

Önemli sayıda Suriyelinin on yıldan fazla bir süredir Lübnan'da uzun süre kalması, Lübnan'ın sosyal ve siyasi yaşamında endişeleri beraberinde getirdi. Suriyeli mülteciler, önde gelen siyasi aktörlerin söylemlerinde kuşkusuz önemli bir yer edinmiştir. Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik söylemin, mezhepsel düzenlemelere dayalı kırılgan siyasi yapılarıyla tanınan Lübnan'ın iç siyasetinin parçalanma çizgileriyle yakından paralel olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Siyasi yapının mezhep ayrımlarına dayandığından, Lübnan devletinin kurumsal yapıları zayıftır ve çoğunlukla mezhepsel mensubiyetin egemenliği altındadır. 2012 yılında siyasi partilerin bölgesel ihtilaflara taraf olmama politikasına (Dissociation Policy) bağlı kalmaları için başlatılan girişimlerin başarısızlığı, siyasi liderlerin Suriyeli mültecilerin varlığına ilişkin kendi yorumlarını ifade etmelerine ve dayatmalarına izin vermiştir. Sonuç olarak, Suriyeli mülteciler iyi tanımlanmış ve tutarlı bir politikadan veya yasal ve idari bir çerçeveden yoksun bırakıldı. Yukarıda anlatılanlar ışığında, Suriye'nin Lübnan'daki konumu etrafında toplanan ve uzun bir süre Lübnan siyasetinin şekillenmesinde önemli rol oynayan Lübnan'ın iki ana siyasi bloğu (8 ve 14 Mart) da müdahaleyi etkilemiş ve Suriyeli mülteci krizini karmaşık hale getirmiştir.

Bazı akademisyenler, bu blokların oluşturdukları ittifakların dağıldığını ve birçok konuda bölündükleri için blokların artık işlevi olmadığını iddia etmektedir. Ancak bu çalışma, 2011'de başlayan Suriye çatışması ve buna bağlı mülteci krizi sonrasında bu iki bloğun yeniden canlandığını ve Lübnan siyasetini tanımlamaya devam ettiklerini siyasi liderlerin Suriye rejimiyle ilişkileri bağlamında Lübnan'daki Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik söylemlerini analiz ederek ortaya koymuştur. Uzun süreden beridir, Lübnan'ı çıkmaza sürekleyen bu koalisyonların günümüzde ülkenin bu dengeye göre şekillenmediği iddia edilmesine rağmen, bu tez Suriye'den gelen mülteci akınıyla beraber tekrardan canlandığını iddia etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Hizbullah Genel Sekreteri Hasan Nasrallah, Hür Yurtsever Hareketi Partisi başkanı Cebran Basil, Gelecek Hareketi Partisi Başkanı Saad Hariri, ve İlerici Sosyalist Partisi Başkanı Velid Canbolat'ın mültecilere karşı söylemleri incelenmiştir.

Siyasi liderlerin politik kaygılarını ve yönelimleri, iç siyasetin olağan dinamikleriyle beraber; sığınmacı tartışmalarının sınırlarını belirleyen ana etmenler olmuştur. Suriyeli mülteci krizi Lübnan siyasi liderleri tarafından nasıl politize edildiği, liderlerin söylemleri incelenerek ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bu analizler ayrıca, mülteci tartışmalarının; mezhep çatışmaları, partilerin ve liderlerin Suriye rejimiyle ikili ilişkileri gibi iç siyasetin dinamiklerinden de beslendiğini ortaya koymuştur.

Örnek olarak, sığınmacıların ülkeye girişinin önüne geçilmesi gerektiğini savunanlar, sığınmacıları ülkedeki ekonominin kötüye gidişinden sorumlu olduğunu, ülkelerine geri gönderilmeleri gerektiği ve ülkede bulunmalarının tehdit oluşturduğu iddialarında ısrarcı olan liderlerin çoğunlukla, Esad rejimiyle ittifak halinde olan 8 Mart blokunun içinde yer alıyor. Bu grup tarafından ortaya atılan argümanlar; sığınmacıların demografik dengelere sarsıcı etkisi olduğunu ve sığınmacıların toplumsal sorunlara neden olduğunu iddia etmektedir. En çok üzerinde durdukları husus da Esad rejimi kontrolü altındaki bölgelerin güvenli olduğunu savunarak sığınmacıların ülkelerine dönmeleri için olağanüstü uygulamaların hayata geçirilmesidir. Diğer taraftan, sığınmacılara karşı daha ılımlı ve kabullenici tutum sergileyen argümanlar; Esad rejimine karşı olan ve muhalif hareketleri ve mültecileri destekleyen 14 Mart koalisyonuna bağlı liderler tarafından dillendirilmiştir.

Lübnan'daki siyasi aktörler, mülteci krizi sırasındaki siyasi tartışmalar bağlamında, siyasi görüşlerinden büyük ölçüde etkilenen söylemlerini sık sık dile getirmişlerdir. 8 Mart bloğundan (Basil / Nasrallah) liderlerin konuşmaları, mültecileri ülke ve toplum için varoluşsal bir tehdit olarak sunan, mülteci karşıtı bir ideolojiyi somutlaştıran en ayrımcı ve dışlayıcı söylemle temsil edilmiştir. Siyasi kutuplaşmanın diğer tarafında ise, siyasi liderler (Hariri / Canbolat) temel olarak insani söylem çizgilerini aşmamışlardır ve uluslararası insan haklarını vurgulamışlardır. Sonuç olarak, onları bir tehdit olarak algılamak yerine, mülteci sorununun insani yönlerine odaklanmışlardır ve onlarla daha fazla dayanışma içinde olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. İki bloğun da kilit olarak nitelendirilen siyasi liderlerinin benimsediği farklı söylemlerin, Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik tutumları şekillendirmede Suriye rejimi karşıtı ve Suriye yanlısı bakış açılarının rolünü gösterdiği ileri sürülebilir. Siyasi liderlerin Suriyeli mülteci krizine ilişkin yorumlarının esas olarak siyasi hedefleri tarafından yönlendirildiği de söylenebilir. Örneğin; Suriye rejimine şiddetle karşı çıkan Velid Canbolat, Suriye ihtilafının başlangıcında ayaklanmayı eleştirmiş ve bunu dış güçlerin Suriye'yi zayıflatma komplosu olarak tanımlamıştır. Ancak, Suriye krizi Lübnan iç siyasetinin bir parçası haline geldiğinde, Suriye rejimine karşı tutumunu doğrudan değiştirmiştir ve Suriye'de acil siyasi reform çağrısında bulunmuştur. Suriye'deki çatışma Lübnan'ın mezhepsel farklılıklar, bölgesel ittifaklar ve siyasi ayrışmalar gibi konular etrafında dönen iç siyasetini etkilemeye başlayınca Canbolat iç siyasetteki endişelerle tutumunu yeniden şekillendirmiştir.

Bu çalışma kutuplaşmış iç politikanın mülteci yönetimi üzerindeki etkisi açısından rolünü değerlendirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Lübnan'daki Suriyeli mültecilerin varlığını düzenleyen ulusal bir politikanın yokluğunda, Suriye yanlısı ve karşıtı rejim kampları olarak 2005'ten bu yana Lübnan siyasetine hakim olan kutuplaşmış bölünme, Suriyeli mültecilerin geleceğini şekillendirmede kilit bir belirleyici olmaya devam etmiştir. Lübnan'daki parçalanmış siyasetin rolüne ilişkin bilgilerden yola çıkarak, burada verilen söylem analizinin de gösterdiği gibi, farklı siyasi liderler konuyu farklı şekillerde ele almaya devam ettiklerinden dolayı, ülkenin mülteci yönetimi konusunda bir çıkmaza girdiği varsayılabilir.

Özetle, bu çalışma, Lübnanlı siyasi liderlerin Suriye mülteci krizini nasıl algıladıklarına ve buna karşılık olarak çıkarlarını ve eylemlerini nasıl formüle

ettiklerine dair akademik bir tartışma sunmuştur. Lübnan'ın karşı karşıya kaldığı mülteci akınının yönetiminde çıkmaza neden olan süreç ve nedenleri araştırmak ihtiyacına istinaden, Lübnan'ın iç siyasetindeki dinamikleri ele almıştır. Lübnan'ın, ülkedeki Suriyeli mültecilerin varlığına yönelik tutumlarını çeşitli faktörler etkilemektedir. Bu çalışma da, Lübnan'ın önde gelen siyasi aktörlerinin Suriyeli mülteci krizine yönelik söylemlerine atıfta bulunarak, ülkenin bölünmüş siyasi yapısı ile liderlerin siyasi çıkarları arasındaki bağlantıya odaklanmıştır. Bu tez, Ev sahibi bir ülkede yürürlükte olan mülteci politikası ve rejimi, yalnızca sınırlı kaynaklarının değil, mezhepsel farklılıklar, bölgesel ittifaklar ve siyasi ayrışmalar gibi konular etrafında dönen iç politikasının da bir işlevi olduğunu göstermiştir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma yerel siyasetin mülteci politikalarının şekillenmesinde belirleyici bir faktör haline geldiğini savunmaktadır.

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