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# *The Diversity of Experiences of Syrian Displaced Persons in Lebanon:*
## *Everyday Exclusion, Informality, and Adjustment Tactics*

Manar Fleifel

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# ABOUT THE ASFARI INSTITUTE AT AUB

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship is a regional hub of a dynamic community of academics, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and members of the general public interested in exploring traditional and innovative forms of collective actions, locally-grounded policy debates and in advancing realistic solutions to the obstacles to effective civil society and citizenship in the Arab world.

In doing so, the Institute provides training workshops and programs beside regular teaching at AUB, encourages and provides evidence-based research in areas related to political participation, accountability and good governance, produces policy/practice recommendations to improve citizens' engagement and civil society roles in mediation, deliberation and self-organization.

It also promotes public awareness of civil society and civic engagement best practices in the region through its monthly meetings and seminars and stimulates fruitful dialogue among the region's varied publics through its programmatic activities of workshops, conferences, blog and publications.

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# About the Project

**THE LAY OF THE LAND:**

*A Social Mapping of Daily Practices in Informality amongst Syrian Displaced Communities in Lebanon*

This research project examines how, in the face of conflict and crisis, Syrian displaced individuals and communities in Lebanon are attempting to (re) organize themselves within the informal sector to secure access to essential services. We understand informality as a sector of goods and services that is outside of, but not necessarily disconnected from the formal purview of the state. In Lebanon, most citizens are already accessing resources such as water and electricity from within the informal sector. Whereas access to such services might ideally be seen as indissolubly linked to the rights of citizens, the distribution of such goods in Lebanon is hardly equal in practice. The access to goods and services by displaced populations is consequently further compounded in such a context where, by the nature of the country's political economy, must also acquire and secure their rights through informal networks.

By addressing this question of informalization and displacement, we reflect on practices of exclusion as experienced amongst Syrian displaced communities from different socio-economic backgrounds who are otherwise perceived as non-citizens in Lebanon. We aim to document through qualitative methods and life history approaches some of the ways Syrian communities have attempted to harness basic livelihood necessities. In so doing, we examine how the Syrian crisis is contributing to the reassembling of these networks, their hierarchies, and ultimately reshaping modes of governance and state borders between Syria, Lebanon and among Syrians themselves.

# The Diversity of Experiences of Syrian Displaced Persons in Lebanon:
## Everyday Exclusion, Informality, and Adjustment Tactics

## Abstract

In the Lebanese context, access to goods and services is chiefly governed by informality where by, owing to the nature of the country's political economy, migrants, marginalized, and displaced populations often ensure their central needs by resorting to informal networks. This study therefore aims to investigate the different coping mechanisms of displaced Syrians inside the Lebanese informal economy and within the exclusionary policies of the Lebanese state. This conference paper is presented as a summary of the major findings and themes resulting from more than one hundred and thirty ethnographic interviews conducted with Syrian displaced communities in more than six different localities in Lebanon in 2018. The study aims to address the following questions: How are different displaced Syrian populations in Lebanon accessing their basic needs in displacement? What are the mechanisms used within the informal sectors of work, health, schooling, and housing? Who are the actors involved (as mediators or "patrons")? What kind of transformations have displaced Syrians undergone in exile? By attempting to answer these questions, the paper will draw on from the themes of replacement within displacement, displaced and marginalized communities' adjustment mechanisms, and forced return. The article also highlights the importance of using a qualitative approach based on in-depth field research to allow for the identification of key indicators and to make the case for the diversity of experiences between displaced communities and persons residing in different areas in Lebanon

## Introduction and Background of the Crisis

Almost a decade into the Syrian crisis, there still exists around 13 million Syrians that have been forced to flee their homes in Syria. This figure includes the internally displaced Syrians and those who sought refuge outside Syria. This means that more than half of the originally 21 million Syrians who resided in Syria before the war have sought a sanctuary outside their homes of origins (Vignal 2018). The events in Syria struck the whole world and the Syrian crisis has been perceived as one of the worst contemporary humanitarian crises, dispossessing millions and rendering them without property and assets, leading to the loss of the lives of family members and loved ones, and transforming the lives of a multitude of communities and individuals. Due to the war, in Syria's neighboring host countries, many Syrian children had lost their right to education whilst the economic situation of families had led them to force their children into labor. A high number of Syrian women, once occupying positions as home makers, having lost the family income had to now partake in new jobs outside their home to ensure economic survival in displacement. Many families have found themselves in new countries, either deprived of their once strong social networks, or in front newly configured social networks and freshly emergent friendships in displacement. In sum, a lot has changed for Syrians since the start of the crisis in 2011.

Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan have been three major refugee hosting countries worldwide. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, Turkey has registered more than 3.5 million refugees, Lebanon around 1 million, and Jordan more than 670 thousand refugees (UNHCR 2019). Lebanon has been regarded as the number one country worldwide to host the highest number of refugees per capita, with more than 1.5 million displaced Syrians residing all over its territories (Government of Lebanon and UNHCR 2019) . The marked difference between the actual UNHCR figure of registered refugees (948,849) and the estimated 1.5 million (Government of Lebanon and UNHCR 2019) is elucidated by several policies and dynamics within the Lebanese governance structure and the dominance of informality in the country. The Lebanese government's politics of reception of the Syrian refugee crisis has been received with mixed spirits. At the beginning of the crisis, Lebanon was praised for its hospitality and resilience (Fakhoury 2017) . Prior to 2014, the Lebanese state's policy has been widely labelled as "the policy of no-policy" (Mufti 2014) due to the fact that the it had not adopted any tangible policies to respond to the crisis. Shortly after, between October and December 2014, the Lebanese government had started adopting a "policy" towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon whereby

a set of regulations were introduced to limit the entry of Syrians to Lebanon. On the 6th of May 2015, due to pressure from the Lebanese government, UNHCR had to stop registering Syrians in Lebanon (Janmyr 2016) (UNHCR 2019). Some described this tactic as an outcome of the thirty years of Syrian military presence in Lebanon and the country's long-term Palestinian refugee presence (Janmyr 2016). As of 2014, Syrians who wished to apply for or renew permits had to pay an annual fee of $200, present a valid passport or identification card, and provide a Kafala (or sponsorship document) to the General Security, where the Kafeel (sponsor), a Lebanese national affirms that he or she is sponsoring a Syrian citizen or household (Amnesty International 2015) . As such, legally, Syrian refugees have thus been left with no status other than that given to Syrian nationals; in Lebanon, they are non-citizens, "displaced", anything but "refugees" (Government of Lebanon and UNHCR 2019). The displaced label is a less politically, economically and historically laden term (Janmyr 2016). By such a negation of Syria's refugee status, the Lebanese government has both, directly and indirectly deprived Syrian refugees of their socio-economic rights and rendered them typically dependent on humanitarian aid, but also on informal means to sustain their livelihoods. To add to all this, Lebanese municipalities and security agencies have been forcing Syrian refugees in several areas to take down their tents, customarily without formal justification or due process (Stel and Van der Meijden 2018) .

When it comes to the reception of aid in Lebanon, there exists a lot of limitations and problems. Aid reception from the UNHCR and other agencies and organizations in Lebanon are a subject of control of the Lebanese government policies. Further, as time passes, the situation gets harder for displaced communities inside Lebanon. Since 2018, there has been a lot of talk about donor fatigue.

The past two years have been key in the history of the two countries and their people. During these recent years, and up until now, there has been a lot of pressure on Syrians to return to the villages and cities where "conflict has ended". This pressure is particularly criticized by Syrian activists and scholars who consider return very premature due to different factors ranging from the fear of persecution to the potential social and economic hurdles that many Syrians could face back home (Mhaissen and Hodges 2019). These laws, policies, and events have thus gravely affected Syrian's residency, mobility, and access to different resources and services such as livelihoods,

jobs, education, and healthcare (Yahya, Kassir and El Hariri 2018), and have succeeded in the reinforcement of the marginalization of these communities. In turn, Syrian displaced communities continue to resort to informal coping mechanisms to sustain their lives and survive under such exclusion and marginalization.

## Significance and Methodology of the Study

The method applied in this study is a qualitative one. Seven researchers conducted life histories and semi-structured, and in-depth interviews with more than 130 displaced Syrians residing in more than 6 localities in Lebanon (including the provinces of Akkar, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Beqaa, the North, and South of Lebanon). The recruitment of researchers was an organic process by which researchers, having formed networks with different Syrians, sent their proposals to focus on different study themes; different types of labor, social networks, community leadership, friendships, housing, etc. Over the course of seven months, starting from April 2018, seven researchers submitted field notes, interview recordings, transcripts, (when interviewees were comfortable with it), and progress reports in which thick descriptions and main findings for each interview were recorded.

In the early phases of the project, the study debated the focus on themes vs. sites and found that the focus on themes is more reflective of the goal of the study whereby a focus on sites becomes thematically limiting. Choosing interviews based on sites would open pathways in undervaluing the mobility of Syrian displaced communities and persons. In addition, this method could result in falling in the chief traps of development and humanitarianism or even the nation-state rhetoric whereby refugees are often placed in one category and perceived through a generalist and reductionist lens: as economic burdens, political threats, very different from the Lebanese people, etc. Malkki, in her critical interpretation of the anthropological study of displacement, warns of the spatial concentration of studying people and the modes of ordering and control associated with it (Malkki 1995). As such, the participants that took part in this study came from different parts of Syria, belonged to different classes, occupied a diversity of positions, and lived in different types of housing.

The qualitative approach used in this study allowed for further and in-depth understanding of both, the

Lebanese informal economy and the different coping mechanisms of displaced Syrians in Lebanon within a prevalent informal economy and an intricate social system. The theoretical framework applied is inspired by Malkki's understanding of the identity and politics of difference, fulfilling the main thesis of her work: understanding the circumstances of particular groups of people and refugees and the complexity of the ways in which different people " [...] construct, remember, and lay claim to particular places as "homelands" or "nations", and " [...] examining how refugees become an object of knowledge and management suggesting that the displacement of refugees is constituted differently from other kinds of deterritorialization by those states, organizations, and scholars who are concerned with refugees." (Malkki 1992, 45).

Henceforth, the interviews focused on a variety of topics, allowing us to delve deeper into the daily experiences of displaced Syrian communities and peoples while a lot of the existing literature on Syrian refugees often employed quantitative approaches in understanding the crisis. Most often, a lot of studies on refugees' view refugees as "domains of knowledge" as termed by Malkki (1995). In Lebanon, the most prevalent form of knowledge on the Syrian displacement stems from reports on responses to the crisis or International and Local Non-Governmental Organizations and Government reports on refugees that rarely rely on the accounts of people or on in-depth explorations of the diversity of experiences of different

groups and persons. This approach to studying the Syrian refugees' "refugee experience" (Malkki 1995) has resulted in a predominance of the search for knowledge around refugees residing in camps (treating them as objects or domains of knowledge) rather than understanding the power dynamics, the exclusionary policies and the context of Lebanon (roots) that explain their different experiences in displacement.

The approach employed in this study, focusing on themes rather than sites, therefore deemed necessary in understanding this diversity of experience of Syrians residing in Lebanon. It is, however, important to draw the reader's attention to one important fact in this aspect; that the focus on themes does not necessarily undermine the importance of the sites where the interviewees resided. More than one third of the interviews took place in Beirut and its outskirts. The second largest number of displaced communities were interviewed in the North of Lebanon, particularly Akkar, and in the Beqaa, two of the poorest and undeserved areas in Lebanon, hosting the largest number of refugees at the time of the interviews. Finally, less than a quarter of interviews were conducted in the South of Lebanon. Figure 1. below shows the distribution of registered refugees in each of the areas mentioned above. It is noteworthy to mention that sites and their districts do denote the differentiated aspects and experiences of displacement. These aspects will be revealed throughout the paper.

**Figure 1.** *Total Registered Refugees (UNHCR 2020)*

| Location name | Source | Data date | Population | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Beirut** | UNHCR | 31 Jan 2020 | | 24.5% | **222,944** |
| **Bekaa** | UNHCR | 31 Jan 2020 | | 37.8% | **344,013** |
| **North Lebanon** | UNHCR | 31 Jan 2020 | | 26.5% | **241,102** |
| **South Lebanon** | UNHCR | 31 Jan 2020 | | 11.2% | **102,197** |

In addition to this framework, the use of a qualitative method in understanding the displacement experience as a process and issues of access are key. This method is vital in understanding processes and journeys as part of a person's history that is changing and not as events in themselves (Ghorashi 2007). The majority of interviewees have described their displacement as a changing one. As time progressed, events changed, and the narration of the access to different services differed according to different factors such as the context of the host country, the laws adopted during a certain period of time, the emergence and limits of opportunities, and the evolution of different networks. As briefly mentioned

before, in Lebanon, a lot of refugees and displaced persons are "subject to" certain types of research or are faced with certain practices of development that could be restrictive: very often, these "subjects" are expected to restrict their complex experiences to questionnaires or long, yet qualitatively limiting assessment surveys. From our experience, the majority of our interviewees were eager to tell us about their experiences and some would do so over prolonged periods. Very often, the researcher was invited to come back for additional interviews with the same persons or communities. Despite these positive opportunities, it would be faulty to consider that all our interviewees were open about their journeys, as some

only answered in short sentences and others refused to be recorded, fearing different dilemmas.

Regardless of the limitations faced, the fieldwork has allowed us to identify the key indicators and to make the case of the diversity of experiences between displaced communities and persons residing in different areas in Lebanon. As such, the aim of the paper is to address the following questions: *How are different displaced Syrian populations accessing their basic needs on Lebanese territories? What types of informal mediations or networking and resource mobilization are taking place? What kind of transformations have displaced Syrians undergone during the 8 years of exile? How would this affect their return perspectives and later their relations with the Syrian regime? Following from these questions, the general focus will be on the exploration of the abovementioned themes, however; the highlight will be on the exclusionary policies of the Lebanese state and the adjustment tactics employed by displaced Syrians residing in Lebanon, in reaction to such marginalization and exclusion. Henceforth, this paper will draw on from the concepts of replacement within displacement, displaced and marginalized communities' coping mechanisms, informality, and forced return.*

## Syrian Refugees and Informality in Lebanon

Informality has been predominantly seen by international agencies and organizations as something to be dealt with, assuming it were separate from the formal economy, signifying that the formal economy can function without it. According to Hart, the informal economy was motivated by the shortcomings of prevalent economic models when it comes to addressing economic deprivation in poor countries (Hart 1985) . It thus became a way to deal with economic exclusion and marginalization. Through access to different services, Hart explicitly derived his analysis from Weber's theory of rationalization. For Weber, economic prosperity was curbed by irregularity and unpredictability in the social life, and thus, the legal state ought to be the guarantor for economic progress (Hart 1985). Similarly, according to de Soto, the place of the poor is outside the legal system, in an extralegal palace where the poor's assets cannot be represented in such a way to be economically useful (the informal economy). An example de Soto refers to is the informal firms with a potential for growing, placed outside the legal framework, are not allowed them to suitably prosper (De Soto 1989) (De Soto 2000). Therefore, it is important to note that

it is not only the poor that are placed outside the legal system, and that the practice of informal mechanisms should not necessarily be attributed to poverty or marginalized communities. In countries like Lebanon, informality is widely practiced by the rich as well as the poor. According to Hart, the formal/informal dualism is based on at least three constructions; informality serving as a variable, a residue of, or a negation to the formal economy (Hart 1985). To add to this, Elyachar, in her study of informal housing in Cairo, finds that the state cannot be located outside informality (Elyachar 2003, 576). The study showed that a lot of the informal housing built in the 1970s and 1980s passed through formal and informal channels, be it informal financial structures or the formal banking system, inside and outside Egypt (Elyachar 2005, 577).

Following from this analysis, the Lebanese state and the Lebanese formal economy are par excellence largely dependent on the informal economy where the unequal allocation of citizen rights to goods and services are knotted with political clientelist networks that extend from the level of formalized state institutions to informal "street politics" of the working class. Resultantly, the access to goods and services by Syrian displaced communities is heavily dependent on informal networks due to the country's political economy. The following sections will demonstrate how Syrian communities have resorted to informal mechanisms in accessing resources and services as well as forged alliances with the different local, political, and economic networks in Lebanon in attempt to harness basic livelihood necessities.

According to an ILO report, a very large proportion of Lebanese (44%) work informally. Most of these workers do not have contracts and are not entitled to social protection. Around 38% of the Lebanese population does not benefit from any kind of health insurance and the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) covers only around 30 percent of the population (Ajluni and Kawar 2015). So, one could only imagine how would this situation is like for displaced Syrians and refugees who face day to day legal and policy constraints. A survey conducted by the ILO in the informal labor market shows that both, Palestinian and Syrian refugees work almost exclusively in the informal market and often earn less than Lebanese, although most of the former work for long hours and with almost no social protection (Ajluni and Kawar 2015). The influx of Syrians into Lebanon has thus magnified the high level of informality that was already existent in the Lebanese economy (ILO 2014). Sanyal, in her exploration of the informal tented

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settlements that a high number of refugees have made homes out of since the beginning of the crisis, finds that studying informality in the housing sector offers an important take in unpacking the ways in which the lack of policies to regulate housing has contributed to the emergence of marginal spaces (Sanyal 2017).

Due to the absence of a proper and fair governance of the crisis (on different levels; housing, education, labor, legality of persons), and due to the presence of oppressive policies and practices, Syrians have been facing increased exclusion and marginalization and becoming highly dependent on informal mechanisms to ensure their basic needs.

## Everyday Exclusion and Marginalization of Syrian Displaced Communities in Lebanon

Since the 60s-economic surge, a lot of Syrians have been seeking work in Lebanon, typically occupying jobs in the sectors of construction and agriculture (Khater 2017). Even prior to the crisis, Syrian workers almost exclusively working in the agriculture and construction sectors; two predominantly informal sectors (Ajluni and Kawar 2015). According to the Lebanese labor code, foreign workers are required to hold a work permit within ten days of entry, allowing them to access social security, the right to a minimum wage and security protections; however, the reality is that most of these workers are working in illegal and informal manners (Khater 2017).

After the crisis, there has been two major milestones in the Lebanese labor policy towards Syrians. To regulate competition in the labor market, Syrian displaced communities were officially allowed to access jobs in

construction, electricity and sales (Khater 2017) .The tables turned in 2015, when the October Policy was applied. Syrians entering Lebanon now had to prove the reason of their stay as under one of the five categories; tourism, business, study, medical treatment, or as economic migrants entering with a Lebanese sponsor or transit to another country (Janmyr 2016). What we understand from this policy is that it limited entry to Lebanon to only those who were financially privileged to do so. The October policy therefore left Syrian nationals with two options. The first option was to pay a 200$ in exchange for a residency through *Kafala* (sponsorship) by a Lebanese citizen (which informally can cost at least $500) thus turning refugees into economic migrants. The second, to rely on a UNHCR registration certificate, which categorizes them as refugees, hence, being denied work. Before it stopped registering Syrian refugees, the UNHCR served as some kind of sponsor for refugees, sponsoring their legal stay. After the Lebanese government halted this registration of refugees by UNHCR which issued registration certificates for refugees crucial for the legal stay (Janmyr and Mourad 2017), many refugees who could not afford the new fees were left unregistered and thus irregular in Lebanon.

Lebanon has witnessed an oversupply of labor and a growing absence of labor rights amidst the crisis, especially in the construction sector. This oversupply has resulted in a drop in wages. With its clientelist business ties, the construction sector is one of the sectors that have benefitted from the situation on a large scale by employing numerous construction workers with lower wages and less social and economic protection. Abed, a 21-year-old single male construction worker from Deir al Zor, working in a Beirut construction site, expressed his livelihoods concerns:

*"Imagine I cannot save a penny and I have to enjoy sitting alone watching people hanging out while I have a bottle of water to drink for the whole day because my salary barely allows me to have a potato sandwich while others are eating hamburgers and juicy food. Life is hard."*[1]

[1] Abed. Interview by Sherif El Housseini, Downtown, Beirut, August 2018.

Here, it is important to note that even before the crisis, most construction workers would remit the biggest share of their wages back home to Syria. With their rent ensured, they use only a little money for food and drink. Alongside lower wages, rising market prices in Lebanon decreased their purchasing power. For many interviewed construction workers in Aramoun, their inability to save money and send enough money back home has resulted in a loss of agency and in feelings of powerlessness and lack of control over the fate of their families.

For Syrian workers in general, the risks and hard labor outweigh the wages. According to an ILO report, poor conditions at work as well as safety takes its toll on Syrian refugees; 12 percent of workers have faced some sort of conflict at work, mainly as a result of a personal clash. If a conflict took place, most stated they did not take any action (ILO 2014).

In the South, as opposed to the general situation in Beirut, our interviewed construction workers lacked sponsorship and had to cover their own rent. Some interviewed construction workers told us that they are forced to buy goods from the owners of the houses they stay in at more expensive rates. Such exclusion and marginalization extend to the Kafala system for Syrians working in the agricultural sector. Despite the seasonal nature of agricultural work that supplies a limited income, several interviewed agricultural workers expressed restrictions to work outside of their Kafeel's fields. If they decide to work elsewhere, they are threatened to be expelled from their informal tented settlements (ITS) and have their Kafala (Sponsorship) withdrawn.

Alongside these exclusionary, abusive, and disempowering policies and legality strains on the workers to pay the fees of kafala, the nature of the Lebanese economy has also served as a very fertile platform for such marginalization and abuse. The Lebanese economy is anthropophagus, widely marked by the entanglement between political clientelist networks that extend from the level of formalized state institutions through to the informal "street politics" of the working class. Our interviews revealed a trend amongst Syrian investors in Akkar who claimed that they had to have close relationships with the clients of the Lebanese State, or "mafias", as they would call them, in order to keep their mid-range businesses open and functioning. Such informal street politics ensures the sustainability of these businesses which remain predominantly unregistered. Several interviewed investors have expressed frustration over the Lebanese states and its clients, the mafias, that demand money from the investors in haphazard manners. Investors such as Mohammad revealed the major tactics employed by Lebanese state to make profits out of newly opened businesses by Syrian investors. Examples of these tactics include the Lebanese state and "its mafias" (as termed by our interviewees) engaging in violent acts of vandalism and threats towards businesses and their owners, forging paperwork, and forcing business owners to pay taxes while their businesses were not legally registered. Taha, a Syrian investor in Akkar expressed his anger towards these informal policies and practices of the Lebanese state:

*"The Health Ministry closed down my business for 5 months. They made up a food poisoning story. It cost me $20,000 to reopen my business. I was not the only one targeted; all the Syrian investors were targeted as well. I fixed things with the ministry and I reopened (my business), fulfilling all their legal requests".[2]*

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[2] Taha. Interview by Elie El Khoury, Akkar, June 2018.

Another interviewee said:

*"I didn't register in the United Nations because I do not want to be a burden on the state. I invested everything here and who benefited from it? The Lebanese state, the painter, the electrician, etc. I consider myself as an investor but the state is treating me like any person who came to Lebanon as a clandestine. I do not pay taxes but I pay electricity and water bills. I would let them take taxes from me, 1000 or 2000 $ each year, but let me work freely and legitimately".*[3]

Furthermore, another key aspect of this exclusion and ambiguity in Lebanese policies towards Syrians is related to the issue of housing. The Lebanese state, fearing a recreation of the Palestinian camps model (security and permanence), has clearly expressed its no-camp policy since the first years of the crisis (Mufti 2014) (Sanyal 2017) (Turner 2015). This has led to the establishment of informal tented settlements of which a majority were found in very secluded areas, far from services such as schools and hospitals and which have constantly been subject to closure. An informal settlement is defined as "…a settlement that was established in an unplanned and unmanaged manner, which means they are generally unrecognized" (Sanyal 2017, 118). As a result, there could or could not be a formal agreement between landlords and residents of the settlement (Sanyal 2017). Our findings suggest that most agreements are informal between landlords or Shawish (the Syrian community leader) and refugees. This housing situation has led to a lot of complications on different levels. For instance, housing has affected education as found by a study by Human Rights Watch on out of school children. many displaced Syrians whose children were out of school stated that one of the major reasons why they do not send their children to school was that schools were far from their homes and transportation costs were expensive (Human Rights Watch 2016).

Further, whereas most humanitarian agencies and international organizations would see the housing issue as a humanitarian crisis that requires humanitarian

response, the main issue with housing for refugees in Lebanon is not only humanitarian in nature but is indeed a very political one, due to the lack of a framework or a failure of a national housing policy (Fawaz 2017). Similarly, Sanyal claims that the existence of ITSs is a result of the lack of desire and ability of the state to manage the crisis. In accepting the establishment of ITSs, the state allows itself to negotiate settlements with power brokers and local communities to gain benefits.

As such, the policies (or lack of) and framework of the Lebanese state easily marginalize and abuse Syrian displaced communities and allow the state and private land owners to abuse Syrians seeking shelter. A group of interviewees in Akkar told us that they had to self-initiate a camp without any formal help before humanitarian and development agencies stepped in. When it comes to the issue of rent in places like Ghazze in Beqaa and Akkar in the North, two areas which were highly inhabited by displaced Syrians, there is no control over rent which has been increasing due to the high demand of Syrians in need of housing. In such areas, none of our interviewees had legal contracts that could protect them from eviction, increases in rent, or other matters that could subject them to danger and increase the precarity of their situation. Lebanese business owners were also profiting from the situation by renting out spaces like generator rooms or garages, as is the trend is in Akkar's Halba. Interviewees claim that the rent of garages was between 150-200 dollars, a fairly expensive rent given the context and services offered. The lack of subsidized housing and

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[3] Humam. Interview by Elie Khoury, Akkar, August 2018.

regulation of the rent market further marginalizes many Syrian displaced communities which consider rent as one of their major life concerns. Thurayya told us:

> *"Rent is the worst part. Help us a bit with the rest, that is all we ask. We can eat anything, we can manage. We just need help with the rent."*[4]

In addition, due to the very bad conditions in the camps and informal tented settlements, several interviewed persons, living in houses or garages in Ghazze and in Halba, told us they preferred living in the worst conditions over living in overcrowded camps. For those interviewees, camps meant no security, no protection, and no sense of home. Apartments they could not afford, garages, or even generator rooms felt more like home for these persons. Such a situation exemplifies how shelter policies or the lack thereof has led to refugees feeling insecure and unprotected.

The lack of access to justice and the silencing of refugees and displaced persons by Lebanese officials could also be considered as part of these exclusionary policies and marginalizing practices. According to an ILO report, there is significant data on workers facing conflict at work resulting in personal clashes. Most interviewed workers stated they did not take any action against such abuses (ILO 2014). In addition, several interviews revealed abuse by Lebanese authorities who beat up Syrians for not having legal papers or simply stopping them and confiscating their money. An incident about a Lebanese police officer killing Syrian workers who worked on his farm was also recorded. Anas said:

> *"Two days ago, my cousin's boss got mad at his Syrian workers in Jib Jannine so he simply shot them all. He would have killed them had no one interfered. He is a police officer. No one says anything because he threatened that if anyone opened their mouth, they would have us arrested. The people involved had to say that Syrians shot and his shots were just self-defense. All of this was done to save the cop's job and reputation."*[5]

This silencing of Syrian refugees in Lebanon proves inevitable since in Lebanon, Syrians have no legal rights or protection frameworks. Then, one could only imagine how their situation worsens if they were paperless. According to a research done by Lebanon Support (2016), lacking both legal status and legal redress puts Syrian refugees at risk for different types of abuse. Interviewed persons have stressed on similar abuses such as being detained for long days for not having legal papers, sometimes for days or longer, for not having legal papers. In addition to the mistreatment they experience, many emphasized the random nature of these confinements (Lebanon Support 2016).

As such, life before and after displacement posed major shifts for displaced Syrians living in Lebanon. Displacement to Lebanon meant the loss of livelihood and downward social mobility for many (Thorleifsson 2016). With the loss of assets and the lack of a proper legal system that would protect them and with the general lack of satisfaction with the humanitarian regime, Syrians had to resort to adjustment tactics to help them

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[4] Thurayya. Interview by Salwa Mansour, Ghazze, May-July, 2018.
[5] Anas. Interview by Salwa Mansour, Ghazze, May-July, 2018.

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cope with displacement. Likewise, even though the war broke many family ties and support networks and led to the loss of whole villages, many Syrians have replaced old networks with new networks. According to a research done by Thorleifsson in 2016, interviewed Syrians residing in Bebnine adopted mechanisms like the reduction of consumption, the reconfiguration of gender and kinship, and increased competition over labor to cope with displacement (Thorleifsson 2016).

## *Coping with the Difficulties in Housing*

As briefly outlined in this paper, the housing situation for Syrians is complex and difficult, given the lack of a proper legal framework and the shortages in assistance targeted towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Through our fieldwork, findings suggest that a majority of interviewees clearly claimed that there is no place like home, but also, we found that many Syrians have tried to find home outside home or make a home out of a house or a tent. This section will discuss the findings of the interviews regarding the coping mechanisms used by displaced Syrians in the face of their experience with exclusion and marginalization in Lebanon.

Respondents used diverse mechanisms and often relied on social and kinship networks to secure an optimal housing situation. In Akkar, the garage or Makhzan (storage room) was a symbol of security and shelter, a place closest to a home yet so far from it at the same time. In the same northern city, women interviewees told us that there were different connotations assigned to different living spaces; living in a garage, a tent, or in the Mukhayyam al-Qusayr (Al-Qusayr Camp) all meant different things. For them, the camp is the furthest to a home. Whenever they could afford it, families chose the makhzan, or the garage as an optimal housing alternative. For our interviewees, the makhzan was regarded as a home many hoped to attain because of the fact that it provided them with security, a certain level of independence, and very importantly, privacy.

Construction workers in Aramoun, coming from al-Manbij, replaced garages with Madafa-s, a room in the house in Syria where guests and family members would gather. Interviewed women living in Ghazze, a village close to the Syrian border, chose to move from the expensive Beirut to Ghazze that they saw as close to home, a borderland –between home, Syria and the new home in exile, Lebanon. Dunya told us:

*"Ghazze became a home that you cannot leave because of the situation in Syria and a home an hour away from the home of origin that one cannot go back to."*[6]

Since rent continues to be unaffordable for many Syrian families residing in some cities in the Beqaa like Ghazze, these displaced communities have to often make difficult decisions to secure privacy and safety by renting a house instead of living in overcrowded camps with unbearable living conditions. For instance, a woman in Ghazze told us that a newly married couple in their family used the toilet as their room. In Akkar, a woman told us that no matter what aid agencies did to build homes for Syrians, they could never build homes, but only houses. Due to this situation, another adjustment tactic that was commonly employed by extended and nuclear families was sharing one house to cut down on rent. This was especially common amongst communities interviewed in the Beqaa and Akkar.

Furthermore, in order to save up on money and travel time, some workers used their workplaces as shelters. This adjustment tactic, previously commonly employed by construction and agricultural workers as well as door keepers became a growingly popular amongst restaurant workers and other daily workers as well. For instance, Jad told us that when he worked in Beirut, and resided in a small village in the Beqaa, he slept at the warehouse in his workplace under the rain and in the cold because the long working would prevent him from going back to the Beqaa. Furthermore, squatting is commonly practiced amongst many interviewed persons, and especially those residing in Beirut and its surroundings. Construction workers often told us that they usually build a home in the construction site to save rent money or live with relatives in the outskirts of Beirut.

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[6] Dunya. Interview by Salwa Mansour, Ghazze, May-July, 2018.

It is a fact that many displaced Syrians try hard to optimize their housing situation by employing diverse maneuvers. Fieldwork showed that most of the visited houses were badly equipped, and many rented rooms were not made for housing human beings and families but rather generators or stock. Often, families had to build, polish, and clean all different types of spaces, and many often established whole camps from zero.

Besides, even when rent could go as expensive as 400 dollars a month for a house in a small village like Ghazze in the Beqaa, displaced Syrians had to put in effort, time, and money to keep up with poor housing. This situation has led to a kind of competition between different families and individuals. In Akkar and the Beqaa, findings suggest that families often compare their living conditions with each other and many resort to borrowing money to try to live up to the expectations of others or their previous living conditions before the war. According to Rania,

## *"From landowners and factory owners to ordinary and informal workers, "[they] all landed on the same UN mattresses".[7]*

As such, and despite efforts to overcome the bad housing situation, access to shelter remains an intense struggle for many, as well as an incomplete project that they must figure out on their own. Our findings parallel the findings of the research conducted by Doraï and Fournet (2018), Syrian refugees in the Zaatari camp have also used mechanisms to make the best out of their housing situation, even where rules and legal constraints were predominant. Similarly to many of the respondents in this project, refugees transformed their housing in relevance to two main constraints; " […]to adapt to their day to day changing economic situation and […] to recreate a private and personalized space, sometimes using traditional patterns, sometimes using new patterns, in a context where legal constraints are extremely strict" (Doraï and Piraud Fournet 2018, 139).

The use of different adjustment tactics reflects the agency of the refugees interviewed for this project and in Doraï and Piraud Fournet's work refugees who adopt strategies to maneuver around the legal and humanitarian system, recreating spaces better adapted to their social and private family lives (Doraï and Piraud Fournet 2018).

## *Work and Livelihoods; Insecurity and Constant Flux as Ways of Life for Many*

Displacement has resulted in major shifts in labor patterns for Syrians, and with the labor restrictions on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, many refugees had to resort to

new mechanisms to sustain their living. Several women assumed new roles outside the household, and work opportunities were no longer limited to the agriculture and construction sectors for Syrians as the case was before the war[8]. After the war, Lebanon witnessed an increase in the competition between local and Syrian workers fleeing to the country, which has been considered to be quite high, especially since Syrian workers, left with no options, work for lower salaries, longer hours, and without social security benefits (ILO 2014).

Whereas some Syrians were able to access formal work, many more were depending on social networks and Lebanese contacts for work. The price of accessing work was often high to pay, but despite this, many of our respondents showed perseverance and agency in the way they were able to sustain access to labor and a living. While there were certain common grounds and coping mechanisms amongst different Syrians, there were still major differences between how different individuals responded differently to their livelihood situation and this often depended on different extraneous factors such as gender, occupation, place of residence, social class, social networks, family structure, etc. For instance, in the case of our interviewed construction and daily workers, at least four main strategies have been observed as coping mechanisms; (1) ensuring housing by either squatting, living together, or living on site (2) cutting down on spending and sending everything back to Syria (through informal money transfer systems to save transfer fees) (3), buying goods through debt, and (4) buying goods informally, such as through a moving van

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[7] Rania. Interview by Salwa Mansour, Ghazze, May-July, 2018.
[8] Kindly refer to Figure 2.

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that was often managed by a foreman. Accessing work in the construction sector in Beirut proved easier than others. Workers who had ties with Lebanese contacts also helped others obtain legal papers.

According to Thorleifsson, Syrians have used social networks, aid and work opportunities to create a new livelihood system and secure their well-being (Thorleifsson 2016). Our fieldwork showed that many respondents accessed work through their families or village networks. This phenomenon was especially evident amongst construction workers who had previously established networks due to their long presence in Lebanon. When we interviewed a community coming from al-Manbij, we learned that several community members joined one man working in the construction sector before the war and this man and his brother continued to provide

work and housing opportunities for other men who were either relatives or fellow villagers.

In another light, due to the different legal and socio-political restrictions on Syrians in general, and the frequent pressures imposed on Syrians owning businesses in Lebanon, co-owning and managing businesses with Lebanese persons became a common tactic, employed whenever possible to ensure access to livelihoods. For example, a woman in the Beqaa established her vegetable shop under a Lebanese person's name to ensure her livelihoods and help feed her family. Owning a business did not necessarily mean living a life of luxury for many Syrians. Although she did manage a vegetable shop under a Lebanese person's name, Dunya had little control over the goods. She told us:

*"Sometimes, when there are old or spoilt vegetables in the tent, I get to take them home and that is helpful."*[9]

In order to access work while being careful from getting caught working without papers, or when working conditions worsened, irregular refugee respondents interviewed in the Beqaa and Beirut used "labor mobility"

(job-hopping; from one job to another) as a common tactic to safeguard their livelihood. A woman in her twenties residing in the Beqaa told the interviewers about her unstable journey in accessing work:

*"[…] In Ghazze, I have worked at a CD store, at [X] bakery, and finally, the clothes shop I work at now. I once worked at a hunting supplies store in Bar Elias. Can you imagine? That's a man's job. I did that for one month, I cannot believe I even got through that long. I also worked at a car rental store in Stanyel and a clothing store in Chtaura."*[10]

Another Syrian man who worked as a door keeper in an apartment building in Beirut at the time of the interview also emphasized the insecurity and instability many Syrians have to endure because of their legal situation:

[9] Dunya. Interview by Salwa Mansour, Ghazze, May-July, 2018.
[10] Sirin. Interview by Salwa Mansour, Ghazze, May-July, 2018.

*"My stability in Lebanon depends on two major factors: the first is related to legality, which means that the General Security Bureau accepts my papers without asking me to leave and the second factor is my boss, the owner of the building, who may change his mind and ask me to leave. This is all related to the mobile life every Syrian person is experiencing on Lebanese soil."[11]*

**Figure 2.** *Summary of the Ratio of Syrians working in "other services" Assembled by Elie El Khoury referencing VASyr 2017 (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP 2017)*

| Rural/peripheral | | Urban/central |
|---|---|---|
| **Halba and Tall Abbas** Semi-Urban and rural | **Tripoli** Urban | **Tripoli** Urban |
| Peripheral in the service economy | Sem-Peripheral in the service economy | Center of the service economy |
| 9% working in "Other services" | 31% working in "Other services" | 57% working in "Other services" |
| A booming service economy | A traditional but growing service economy | Highly competitive and almost saturated service economy |

When it comes to education, it seems that despite the fact that several respondents did have university degrees, they were unable to use these degrees in their field. For instance, at least three interviewed engineers residing in Beirut were working in restaurants.

One of the limitations of this research is the little information it gathered about access to health, however, there were a few common issues we have noted across the different areas and amongst different Syrians we interviewed. Firstly, health is often neglected due to the lack of access to general healthcare for Syrians in Lebanon and due to some Syrian's lack of assets that enable them to access private healthcare. One person told us that their child had died trying to get into a hospital. Further, some respondents preferred travelling back to Syria to access healthcare. Thirdly, some respondents explained that in the case where communities knew someone suffered from a life-threatening situation, they would contribute to treat this person.

## Altered Social Networks and New Friendships

Before the war, Syrian families typically settled close to one another. After the crisis, a lot has changed and in turn, communities had to adapt to changing realities. On

the positive side, several Syrian families have decided to reside in a place that members of their families had previously established networks in. For instance, in Thorleifsson's study, several respondents said that they had chosen to settle in Bebnine because they held an existing social network of in town that could support them (Thorleifsson 2016). Migration was thus seen as a collective decision. In the same line, our findings also support this claim especially amongst construction workers and door keepers who invited their families and networks to stay with them after the war broke out. On the adverse side, the war lead to a scattering of families and this in turn has contributed to the loss or weakening of social support (Thorleifsson 2016). Despite this, new friendships and networks emerged after the war. For instance, women gathered and formed new friendships with their neighbors or with other women attending the same activities provided by humanitarian agencies. Social capital has been proven to play a forcefully positive role in the mental and economic wellbeing of refugees (Uzelac, et al. 2018).

In exile, refugees managed to replicate the financial hierarchies in the family and fuse it with the functional one. For example, foremen amongst construction workers (who were often family members) took the place of older family members who once managed the household's

[11] Hamad. Interview by Sherif El Housseini, Bliss, Beirut, May 2018.

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income. Foremen would thus receive all the cash, assign tasks and distribute profits. In some cases, they might take the responsibilities for the family members in paying off the house bills, rent and even fund for their marriages. Wealth was shared among the community members. Foremen were thus seen as emergent social figures that symbolized both, social and human capital. As such, family ties were recreated in exile.

It is important to note that in some cases, interviewees noted that their social networks have strengthened in displacement since they felt they needed to stick together while they were being rejected by host communities. According to a middle-aged daily worker;

*"Lebanese society does not welcome us so instead we mingle together. We cannot wait to see each other; we are poor people that gather around each other"*[12]

In Ghazze, interviewed women claim to have developed deep friendships with other women as a result of displacement. With some family members still behind in Syria, women started forming new kinds of friendships with each other. These women would act like family members with each other; helping around the house, sharing wealth, and spending time together as families do.

In the previous paragraphs, I attempted to decrypt the daily coping mechanisms employed by Syrians in Lebanon. We notice that individuals and communities greatly differed in the way in which they approached daily issues of access and exclusion from the Lebanese society.

In the following section, the focus will be on the diversity of experiences amongst Syrian displaced communities in Lebanon.

## The Diversity of Experience

Since the beginning of the crisis, a lot of the reports issued by humanitarian agencies and the international community would refer to Syrians as if belonging to one category. Whilst discussing issues of gender and child labor, international and local agencies and organizations use the categories of age and gender as scientific variables, a phenomenon that has resulted in the quantification of the refugee experience without really diving into the unique and individual experiences of different refugees. This study, given its qualitative nature, attempts to transcend these categories and find the major common issues being faced by different Syrians

and the key points of difference without attempting to merely categorize them based on gender, class, or occupation, but by letting them speak for themselves and identify themselves.

It is true that we did interview restaurant workers, construction workers, certain women living in different areas of Akkar and Ghazze, but in doing so, this study aimed at being mindful of prejudices and preconceived notions. At first, the research looked into the informal mechanisms adopted by displaced communities then it took a turn as the findings surmounted prejudiced categories and labels and helped prove that that each person's experience is unique. Despite this, it is noteworthy mentioning that at times, there were certain commonalities between certain groups, living in certain areas, and occupying similar jobs.

For instance, investors in Akkar had completely different experiences from those operating their businesses in Beirut. Before proceeding with the findings pertaining to the investors' differentiated experiences, it is important to note that Akkar, like other cities and villages in the Beqaa, is a deeply impoverished area. In such areas, there is little or no provision of services such as water, electricity, and sanitation, and this situation goes back way before the Syrian displacement. Whereas some may argue that many cities inhabited by displaced Syrians have been witnessed a boom in the provision of services, over the years, the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan reports that these impoverished areas have been suffering strong strains in the economy and infrastructure (UNHCR 2020) (Cherri, González and Delgado 2016). It is also argued

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[12] Abu Khalil. Interview by Mikhael Daher, Suburbs of Beirut, April –May 2018.

that areas like Akkar have been deeply neglected by the state and humanitarian and development organization prior to the crisis (Carpi 2014).

Despite these facts, through our interviews, we find that in Akkar, it was somewhat easier to start a business than in Beirut. At the same time, even amongst different investors in Akkar, we witnessed differences. In the case of Akkar, the restaurant industry had recently developed as a result of Syrian displacement. Syrians fleeing war brought their savings and invested their capital in the restaurant sector. In addition, a high number of NGOs employing mainly nationals from Akkar and the North pushed consumption levels further as the employees received relatively high salaries. In summary, the service economy boomed in Akkar after the Syrian crisis. Halba, the administrative capital of Akkar, had 5 small restaurants and cafés before the crisis. A Syrian poultry restaurant owner said:

## "Since the crisis 25 poultry snacks have opened, not counting coffee shops and restaurants".[13]

Another coffee shop owner endorsed the opinion of his fellow investor quoted above. He said:

## "Everything would collapse if we (Syrians) leave; from the collapse of rent prices to the amount of sheep one butcher would slaughter per day (from 3 to one)".[14]

Most of the Syrian population that settled in Akkar hailed from Homs, a district that is known for its well-established poultry and sweets businesses in Syria. Syrian investors and restaurant workers who settled in Akkar brought their capital and skills and lead the restaurant industry boom in its cities, particularly in Halba's main street. The business owners felt more at ease in Akkar compared to the ones in Beirut and Tripoli as in former, market was relatively new with a few competitors, the rents were cheaper, the population was rapidly growing, and their Lebanese and Syrian customers were familiar with their products. Furthermore, a lot of International and Local Non-governmental agencies (I) NGOs had invested greatly in this region.

Furthermore, and when it comes to the issue of return, investors whose businesses were doing well were thinking of staying in Lebanon and others like Abu Ahmad who said: *"No one likes us here"[15]*, expressed their lack of willingness to return once the situation was settled in Syria. Depending on their stories; Syrians of different occupations and classes would prefer staying or leaving depending on a number of issues. Some did not have anyone left in Syria so they preferred to stay in Lebanon and maybe migrate outside Lebanon later. Young men were the ones who were less inclined to return, fearing military conscription.

Moreover, there were key differences noted between the lifestyles of construction workers and waiters residing in Beirut. Interviewed waiters tended to be more involved with the Lebanese society and mingled with Lebanese people more than construction workers did due to many reasons. Firstly, interviewed waiters were often single and earned more than construction workers. Most construction workers often saved their money and sent it back to Syria. Waiters, who were mostly coming from cities like Damascus, Tartous, or Aleppo in Syria, as opposed to construction workers, mostly coming from villages, often resided in apartments in Beirut and around its suburbs while construction workers would reside on site along with other family or community members. On average, our interviewed construction workers earned 450 dollars per month, whereas waiters could earn up

[13] Abu Hamad. Interview by Elie Khoury, Akkar, August, 2018.
[14] Yassin. Interview by Elie Khoury, Akkar, July, 2018.
[15] Abu Ahmad. Interview by Elie Khoury. Akkar, July 2018.

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to 750 dollars. These differentiated economic experience further contributes to the diversity of lived experiences.

Likewise, in the Beqaa, the interviewed women had different experiences, complaints, and concerns as compared to those in Akkar. In Akkar, the women were mostly concerned with the type of housing (garages, Mukhayyam al-Qusayr, or the Informal Tented Settlement) whereas in Ghazze, most resided in apartments and were concerned about the rent. Community members from same villages were different from one another and had different visions about their future and return to Syria. Members of the same families had different perceptions of return.

In sum, displacement resulted in a diversity of experiences in the past, present and future lives of different Syrians.

## Conclusion

This study showed that the displacement of Syrians due to the war has resulted in the emergence of new dynamics in the lives of Syrians. Given the exclusionary and restrictive policies of the Lebanese state and the overall mismanagement of the crisis by the international community and Lebanon, displaced Syrian communities in Lebanon had to resort to informal mechanisms to access their basic livelihood necessities. In doing so, Syrians primarily depended on pre-existing and new social networks, and even more so if they had an irregular status. The research findings suggest that there is clear distinctiveness amongst different classes, groups, genders, and occupations of Syrians residing in different areas in Lebanon. Lifestyles, complaints, goals, and perceptions of return differed from one person and group to another. Every experience is thus unique, despite the existing commonalities between certain groups of Syrians occupying the same jobs and residing in same areas. Overall, we can conclude that that there is an overarching dissatisfaction with the international community, organizations, and agencies, especially the United Nations (UN) agencies such as the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many interviewed respondents claimed that UN agencies do not properly respond to their actual needs. Further, Syrians are very mindful of the corruption taking place in the management of the crisis. In addition, there is an evident fear of Lebanese authorities amongst Syrians due to the lack of justice and rights for Syrians resulting in random evictions and restrictive regulations.

As Malkki proposed, many people (scholars included) see identity through this lens of essentialism is a cultural and political fact to be recognized. But this does not mean that our analytical tools must take this form (Malkki 1992) (Malkki 1995). Since the beginning of the crisis, a lot of the reports issued by humanitarian agencies and the international community would refer to Syrians as if belonging to one category. Whilst discussing issues of gender and child labor, they might categorize Syrians into these categories of age and gender, often quantifying refugees without really diving into their unique and individual experience. Our research, given its qualitative nature, attempted to transcend these categories and find the major common issues being faced by different Syrians and the key points of difference without using essentialist tools, but by letting them speak for themselves and identify themselves in a way to resonate with Malkki's words : "Identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, et cetera. It is a creolized aggregate composed through bricolage." (Malkki 1992, 37).

To put this study in the context of today, Syrian refugees are currently at face with at least there three major perils in Lebanon.  Firstly, the continued deportation/forced return to Syria is still ongoing and is predicted to climax in the coming year as Lebanon presently faces very difficult socio-economic conditions.  Secondly, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are suffering the most from the deteriorating economic crisis in the country. In the past year as the economic crisis started reaching its peak, Syrian families have been suffering from increased rent rates, shortages in basic needs such as gas, work troubles (due to the nature of their work (daily and informal), and the devaluation of the little aid they continue to receive (Sewell 2020). Finally, Syrian refugees could be at risk for contacting the COVID-19 (Coronavirus). If COVID-19 were to spread amongst refugees, this will cause a lot of repercussions that could drive politicians to reinitiate forced and premature returns. Syrian refugees in Lebanon surely face a lot of concerns amidst this global health threat, given two major facts; i. many live in bad housing conditions that could serve as a fertile ground for the spread of the virus, and ii. issues of access to health are still of great concern.

All of these scenarios are likely to add risks to the already precarious lives of many Syrians in Lebanon. Further, as the whole world is currently struggling to fight the current economic and health crises, and as war is still ongoing in Syria with Bashar al-Asad as president, the need to address

the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has become more dire than ever. UN agencies, local and international organizations, along with the Lebanese government should work together towards a plan to raise awareness and contain the virus in Lebanon, both, amongst host and refugee communities. After the containment of this health crisis, the new Lebanese government should consider addressing the real issues at hand such as legal status of refugees, access to work and basic needs, and the premature return to Syria. Lastly, UN agencies, local and international agencies and organizations, along with the US and EU governments should all work together to mobilize funding towards sustainable and durable solutions rather than programs and projects that do not serve the current and future needs of Syrians in Lebanon.

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