LÜBNAN'DA SİYASİ İSTİKRAR VE MÜLTECİLER

ÖZ

Bu makale, Filistin ve Suriyeli mülteci krizinin Lübnan'daki siyasi istikrara etkisini karşılaştırmaktadır. Filistin mülteci topluluğunun 1970 sonrasında militarize olmasının yanı sıra bu topluluğun Lübnan toplumuna eklemlenmesi (tawteen) üzerindeki tartışmalar, 1975 yılında Lübnan'da iç savaşın patlak vermesinin temel etkenleriydi. 2011 yılından beri Lübnan'a göç eden Suriyeli mültecilerin sayısının 1 milyonu geçmesi, Lübnan'ın yine siyasi bir çöküş ve sivil çatışmaya tanıklık yapıp yapmayacağı konusundaki benzer endişeleri arttırmaya başlamıştır. Lübnan'daki mevcut mülteci krizi genel olarak 1970'lerdeki ile karşılaştırılabilecek nitelikte olsa da, mevcut mülteci krizinde mülteci topluluğunun profilinin değişiklik arz etmesinin, bunun yanı sıra krizin çok daha geniş bir ölçeğe sahip olmasının farklı dinamikleri ortaya çıkardığı iddia edilmektedir. Özellikle ev sahibi toplumun ve mülteci topluluğunun arasındaki çizgilerin ailesel, kişisel veya diğer bağlantılar yoluyla birbirine girmesi, Lübnan'da bugünkü mülteci siyasetinin dinamiklerini 1970'lerin başındakinden belirgin bir şekilde farklı kılmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, her ne kadar Lübnanlı siyasi aktörler başlangıçta mülteci sorununu siyasallaştırmaya çalışmışlarsa da, krizin ölçeği bunu siyasal değil, ülkedeki siyasi muhalifler arasındaki mesafeyi azaltmaya hizmet eden ulusal bir mesele haline getirmiştir. Bu durum mevcut krizin Lübnan devletine varoluşsal bir tehdit oluşturma ihtimali olmadığı anlamına gelmemektedir. Daha ziyade, bu krizin doğası öyle bir hal almıştır ki, Lübnan iç savaşının öncesinde ve sonrasında olduğu gibi mülteci sorununu tecrit etme çabaları, artık çok mümkün gözükmemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı, Rusya, Suriye

الاستقرار السياسي في لبنان و أزمة اللاجئين :

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خلاصة:

يتناول هذا المقال اثر نزوح اللاجئين السوريين والفلسطينيين علي استقرار الوضع السياسي بلبنان. ان نزوح اللاجئين الفلسطينيين على المجتمع اللبناني بعد عام 1970 كان من اهم الاسباب التي ادت الي نشوب الحرب الاهلية بلبنان عام 1975. كما ان تجاوز عدد اللاجئين السوريين الذين بدءوا بالنزوح الي لبنان اعتبارا من عام 2011 المليون تسبب في خلق حالة من القلق تجاه نشوب نزاعات داخلية جديدة وتدهور الوضع السياسي في البلاد. بالاضافة الي ان ازمة اللاجئين الموجودة في لبنان في حال تمت مقارنتها بالحالة التي وصلت اليها البلاد عام 1970، نجد ان هناك بعض الادعاءات التي تزعم ان الشكل العام للاجئين تغير هذه المرة وتبلور لياخذ شكلا اكثر خطورة . خاصة بعد ظهور حالة من التنافر بين اللاجئين واهالي لبنان نتيجة اسباب سياسية او عائلية وغيرها، وكل هذا ادى الي ظهور ازمة اللاجئين بصورة اكثر وضوحا عما كانت عليه في عام 1970. وعلاوة على ذلك فبالرغم من محاولة السياسيين اللبانين في تسييس مشكلة اللاجئين السوريين والاستفادة منها فانهم لم يجعلوها مسالة سياسية بل انهم جعلوا منها مسالة قومية واستفادوا منها في تقليل حالة الخناق بين قوى المعارضة داخل الدولة. ولكن هذا الوضع لا يعني ان مسالة اللاجئين لا تشكل تهديدا على الدولة اللبنانية. كما ان مسالة اللاجئين في لبنا ن اصبحت امرا مألوفا لدرجة ان كل الجهود التي بذلت من اجل القضاء عليها قبل الحرب الاهلية وبعدها فشلت واصبح القضاء عليها امرا مستحيلا.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: لبنان , سوريا, اللاجئون , الحرب الاهلية.

REFUGEES AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN LEBANON

ABSTRACT

This article compares the Palestinian and Syrian refugee crises on political stability in Lebanon. Debates over the "implantation" (tawteen) of the Palestinian refugee community, alongside the increasing militarization of the community after 1970 were key factors in the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975. The arrival of over 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon since 2011 has raised similar concerns of whether Lebanon will again witness political collapse and civil conflict. However, it is argued that whilst the current refugee crisis in Lebanon is broadly comparative to the events of the early 1970s, the scale of the current refugee crisis alongside the different profile of the refugee community has created different dynamics. Specifically, the blurring of lines between the host community and the refugee community through familial, personal, and other links makes the dynamics of refugee politics in Lebanon today markedly different from that of the early 1970s. In addition, where Lebanese political actors had initially sought to politicize the refugee issue, the scale of the crisis has made this a national, not political issue, serving to reduce the distance between political opponents in the country. This is not to argue that the current crisis does not pose potentially existential challenges to the Lebanese state. Instead, the nature of the crisis is such that efforts at isolating the refugee "problem", as took place before and after the Lebanese civil war, are not possible today.

Keywords: Lebanon, Syria, Confessionalism, Refugees, Civil Conflict

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, an estimated 2.5 million people have fled the country. Syria's neighbour, Lebanon, has received the highest number of arrivals, with over 1 million refugees registered by the UNHCR as of April 2014. With a population of just over 4.5 million, this massive influx of displaced people has given Lebanon the highest per capita concentration of refugees anywhere in the world.[1] Such a situation, in and of itself, would place massive strain on any state. However, the precarious political situation in Lebanon prior to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, alongside its history of inter-confessional conflict, raises serious concerns for the stability and viability of the Lebanese Republic. These concerns come into sharper relief through comparison to the impacts of the Palestinian refugee influx after the 1947-48 Arab-Israeli War and the 1967 Six Day War, events that tipped Lebanon's fragile confessional balance into civil war in 1975.

This article compares the impacts of the Palestinian and Syrian refugee crises on the stability and viability of Lebanon's confessional system. In particular, it investigates the assumption that the current crisis is, as some claim, "strikingly parallel to the period preceding the 1975-90 civil war".[2] Overall, despite the centrality of the Palestinian role in the civil war and concerns over "implantation" (*tawteen*) of refugee communities, it is argued that there are important distinctions between the two refugee crises that have significant ramifications for political stability in Lebanon. In particular, this article will compare the size of the refugee communities, arrival and settlement patterns, the contrasting legal status of the two communities within Lebanon, the different spill-over dynamics of the "push" conflicts on the host society, and the particular nature of refugee politics toward the Palestinian community as opposed to the Syrian community highlighting key distinctions between the two events.

The differences between the Palestinian and Syrian refugee crises have had two, seemingly contradictory, implications. First, that the current crisis has the potential to be more of an existential threat to the survival of the confessional political system in Lebanon. Second, the very scale of this crisis has created short-term cooperation between the rival March 8 and March 14 coalitions that has the potential to circumvent this challenge. In other words, the magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and the particular relationship between Lebanon and Syria has forced political elites to preserve the system rather than exploit the issue for political gain, moving it from a political to a national crisis. This represents both the severity of the current threat to confessional politics in Lebanon and the potential for its consolidation.

[1] For the full data-set on the Syrian refugees, see <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

[2] Joseph Bahout, "Lebanon at the Brink: The Impact of the Syrian Civil War", *Middle East Brief* (Crown Center for Middle East Studies), No. 76 (January 2014), p. 5.

Palestinian Refugees and Civil War in Lebanon

The Palestinian refugee community arrived in Lebanon in the wake of the first Arab-Israeli war, numbering over 100,000. With the solidification of Lebanon's confessional system of governance in 1943, this influx of predominantly Sunni Muslims immediately raised critical questions as to how the new state, in which political power was derived from the confessional model, would accommodate the arrivals. Whilst Lebanese attitudes were initially sympathetic to the Palestinian plight, it was the clear expectation on both a political and societal level that shelter within Lebanon was a temporary arrangement.[3] Simply put, the Lebanese government, and by extension the population, responded to the arrival of the Palestinians on the assumption that pending a political solution with Israel the refugees would enact their right of return to their pre-1948 homes.

For the Christian political elite in Lebanon, this view reflected an effort to preserve the country's nascent confessional system of governance. After Lebanese independence in 1943, political posts and representation in the Lebanese parliament were allocated according to religious identity, with a permanent Maronite Catholic President with strong executive powers, Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, Shi'a Muslim Speaker of the House and a division of parliamentary seats according to the 1932 census, administered by the French Mandate authorities, that allocated six Christian members for every five Muslim members.[4] As such, the post-independence government of Bechara el Khoury was wary of the implications of a permanent settlement of non-Christians within the country.

The settlement pattern of the refugee community reflected this view, as a camp system was devised initially to shelter, and then contain the refugees. The United Nations Works and Refugee Agency (UNRWA) was founded against this backdrop through Resolution 302 (IV) in 1949, with a specific mandate to provide 'direct relief and works programmes' to registered Palestinian refugees, to 'prevent conditions of starvation and distress… and to further conditions of peace and stability'.[5] While the creation of UNRWA served a vital humanitarian purpose, literally feeding and clothing people, the organization also had profound ramifications on identity politics within the displaced Palestinian community, serving to strengthen the communal refugee identity. With the establishment of UNRWA, the bulk of the refugee community were sheltered within a system of camps. As a result, the international community effectively assumed responsibility for the humanitarian

[3] Rami Siklawi, "The Dynamics of Palestinian Political Endurance in Lebanon", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 6, 2010, p. 601.

[4] Benjamin MacQueen, *An Introduction to Middle East Politics*, (London: Sage, 2013), p. 100.

[5] For the full text of UNGA Resolution 302 (IV), 1949, see <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/051/21/IMG/NR005121.pdf?OpenElement>

aspect of the refugee community.[6] While some levels of informal economic and social integration inevitably occurred, the refugees were largely exceptionalized within Lebanon. Between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, the Lebanese state passed a raft of legislation to ensure Palestinian exclusion from a range of professions and to place strict limitations on land ownership.[7] In the absence of space within Lebanese society, the UNRWA camps evolved to meet more than basic humanitarian needs, operating as sites of economic, political and social community. These camps, and the international approach which underpinned their existence, also operated on the assumption that a political solution to the refugee plight would be forthcoming.[8] Coupled with the Lebanese determination to resist a forced resettlement, this dynamic worked to perpetuate the view both within and outside the camps that the presence of the refugee community was temporary, and as such isolation from the political activities of the Lebanese state was inevitable.

For el Khazen, the 1968-1971 period represented a critical juncture in the Palestinian experience in Lebanon.[9] The phase would see the community move from its insularity and apparent political neutrality toward more direct involvement in Lebanese and regional politics, a development which was critical in straining the fragile political balance in the country. As the Arab states reeled after the comprehensive Israeli victory in the 1967 war, the newly formed Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as well as loosely affiliated groups in the refugee camps in southern Lebanon turned to guerrilla tactics in their confrontation with Israel.[10] By April 1969, the assertiveness of the Palestinian militias in Lebanon had generated conflict with the Lebanese Army and the two forces battled for control of the camps. The inability of the Lebanese government to contain Palestinian assertiveness, alongside significant pressure from Syria and Egypt, led to the signing of the 1969 Cairo Accord that guaranteed Palestinian security control over the camps. This enhanced the right of Palestinians to work within Lebanon and increased freedom of movement, including the right to continue a military campaign against Israel from Lebanese territory, in return for an acceptance of Lebanese sovereignty.[11]

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[6] Milton Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, (Washington DC: Middle East Institute, 1984), p. 10.

[7] See for example, Lebanese Decree No. 17561 of 18/9/1962 which effectively prevents Palestinians from working without the express permission of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This was further strengthened in December 1995 with Ministerial Decision No. 621/1, which lists 50 professions in which Palestinians cannot work. On restrictions on land ownership for Palestinians see: Legislative Decree No. 11614 of 14/1/1969 (amended April 3, 2001).

[8] UNRWA, "Resolution 302" <http://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-302>

[9] Farid el Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 132.

[10] Karol Sorby, "Lebanon and the 1969 Cairo Agreement", *Arichiv Orientalni*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 2012.

[11] Rex Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival, the PLO in Lebanon*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 201-202.

In effect, the Arab states, most of which sought to reign in Palestinian militancy within their own borders, forced Lebanon to acquiesce to the use of its territory as a primary front in the conflict against Israel.[12] As Peteet asserts, the Accord transformed Lebanon from a place of Palestinian refuge into "a site of revolt against displacement".[13]

The Palestinian experience, similar to broader Lebanese politics, cannot be viewed in a vacuum and the PLO's experience in other regional states had significant ramifications for Lebanon. The Cairo Accord, with its provision of relative autonomy for the PLO, would prove timely as the leadership concurrently moved to confront the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan. By September 1970, the Jordanian regime responded, launching an armed offensive against PLO positions inside the country. The "Black September" confrontation left several thousand refugees dead, and also forced the PLO leadership and fighters to relocate to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Therefore, the Cairo Accord effectively allowed the PLO to formalize its leadership role amongst the increasingly active and militant Palestinian groups in Lebanon, sharpening tensions with both Israel and the Frangieh government in Beirut. As Rami Siklawi argues, the events of Black September and the subsequent flight of the PLO hierarchy, effectively "turned southern Lebanon into an enduring battlefield in the region".[14] In this way, the tensions unleashed by Lebanon's failure to neutralize Palestinian militancy and its inability to defend its territory against the consequent Israeli incursions, mixed with the regional determination to safeguard the expression of Palestinian militancy within Lebanon, helped precipitate the Lebanese civil war of 1975.

The zenith of Palestinian strength in Lebanon may well have been the Melkart Protocol, signed on May 17, 1973, which reinforced the freedoms granted to the Palestinian community in the Cairo Accord of 1969. Added to Lebanon's own sectarian tensions, the empowerment of the PLO and the expression of regional agendas through the Lebanese environment led to open conflict within the state and civil war erupted in 1975. However, as war broke out, the PLO was crushed in the Syrian intervention of 1976 and in-fighting and cross-confessional conflict marked the remainder of the Palestinian experience in Lebanon. This culminated in 1982 with the Israeli invasion, subsequent siege of Beirut, and the exile of the PLO hierarchy to Tunis.[15] The autonomy secured by the PLO leadership was obliterated and the refugee community was left leaderless and largely isolated within the post-war environment.

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[12] Karol Sorby, "Lebanon and the 1969 Cairo Agreement", p. 66.

[13] Julie Peteet, "From refugees to a minority, Palestinians in post-war Lebanon", *Middle East Report*, Issue 200 1996, p. 28.

[14] Rami Siklawi, "The Dynamics of Palestinian Political Endurance in Lebanon", p. 597.

[15] The Lebanese state unilaterally abrogated the Cairo Agreement in 1987.

In retrospect, the Palestinian impact upon Lebanese stability is evident. The refugee influx drew Lebanon more deeply into the regional political struggle between Israel and the Palestinians. Lebanon was impacted through the physical presence of the Palestinian community, and the increasing determination of militia groups to confront Israel. As powerfully, the Palestinian presence acted as a conduit for broader Arab influence, in which the Arab determination to support Palestinian militancy within Lebanon was played out. Indeed, Arab pressure saw Lebanon cede elements of its sovereignty to the refugee community, a development that acted as a significant catalyst for the outbreak of conflict between Lebanese factions.

The Palestinian and Syrian Refugee Communities in Lebanon

With this heritage of large-scale refugee intake and its connections to the outbreak of full-scale civil war, the current influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has raised similar concerns. Indeed, the sheer size of the Syrian refugee community in Lebanon, well over 1 million by mid-2014, has clear implications for the stability of the historically fragile state. However, the size of the current crisis, as well as differences between the communities in terms of links within Lebanon and the current state of Lebanese politics raises important points of distinction. It is argued here that these differences carry with them particular implications for political stability in Lebanon that, on the one hand, does not make resultant civil war an inevitability but, one the other, raises the stakes for Lebanon much higher should conflict erupt in the current climate. Indeed, the current situation holds within it the possibility of an existential threat to Lebanon's confessional system of governance.

Settlement Patterns and the Legal Status of Palestinian and Syrian Refugees

The most obvious point of difference between the two communities is their comparative size. The original Palestinian refugee community, as registered by UNRWA, was in excess of 100,000 in 15 camps. These numbers have grown to just under 450,000 registered refugees by 2014 with around half of those in the 12 remaining camps.[16] The UNRWA-administered camps are spread throughout the country, Ein el Hillweh and Mieh Mieh adjacent to Saida and Rashidieh, Burj Shemali and El Buss next to Tyre in the south, Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi on the outskirts of Tripoli in the north, with Shatila, Burj Barajneh, Mar Elias, and Dbayeh circling Beirut in the west and Wavel in the east. As Table 1 shows, there is a relatively even spread of numbers across the camps. This can be contrasted with the UNHCR registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon that, as of 12 June 2014, numbered 1,100,486.[17]

[16] UNRWA, "Where we work" <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>

[17] UNHCR, "Syrian Regional Refugee Response" <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>

The UNHCR has estimated that the number could exceed 1.5 million by December 2014. As Table 2 shows, the majority of the registered Syrian refugees are in the Bekaa region in eastern Lebanon, with smaller but significant numbers in the North and around Mount Lebanon and Beirut, and a growing community in the South.

The Palestinian refugee community formed a largely homogenous group, sharing the religious and sectarian identity of Sunni Muslims. Whilst an estimated 7% of the original Palestinian refugee community were Christians, the religious composition of the refugee community was homogenised with the wide-spread granting of citizenship to the Christian Palestinians in the 1950s and 1960s.[18] This political act, aimed at stabilizing the Maronite Christian hold on power within Lebanon, also served to entrench the Sunni Muslim identity of the Palestinian community. This in turn, sharpened the fears of the Maronite Christian elite that any further attempt to naturalize the Palestinians, or move toward a permanent implantation, would threaten the institutional dominance they enjoyed in the Lebanese political system.

Table 1 Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (UNRWA figures as of June 2014)

Camps (North)	*Registered Refugees*	*Camps (Bekaa)*	*Registered Refugees*	*Camps (Beirut/Mt Lebanon)*	*Registered Refugees*	*Camps (South)*	*Registered Refugees*
Nahr el-Bared	27,000 (est)	Wavel	8,806	Burj Barajneh	17,945	Ein el Hillweh	54,116
Beddawi	16,500			Shatila	9,842	Rashidieh	31,478
				Dbayeh	4,351	Burj Shemali	22,789
				Mar Elias	662	El Buss	11,254
						Mieh Mieh	5,250
Total: 209,993							
Source: UNRWA <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/camp-profiles?field=15>							

Table 2 Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (UNCHR figures as of June 2014)

Region	*Registered Refugees*	*Region*	*Registered Refugees*
Bekaa	364,518	Beirut/ Mt Lebanon	279,913
North	274,877	South	128,590
Total: 1,100,486			
Source: UNHCR <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>			

[18] Kathleen Fincham, "Shifting Youth Identities and Notions of Citizenship in the Palestinian Diaspora: The Case of Lebanon" in Dina Kiwan (ed.) *Naturalization Policies, Education and Citizenship: Multicultural and Multinational Societies in International Perspective*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 175. The small Palestinian Shi'a community in the south of Lebanon was also granted Lebanese citizenship in 1994.

Table 3 Source of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (UNCHR figures as of June 2014)						
Source	*% of total*	*Number*	*% of total*	*Number*	*% of total*	*Number*
Homs	80.9%	5,419	45.7%	75,406	22.4%	235,204
Aleppo	2.1%	141	12.0%	19,800	19.8%	207,682
Damascus	1.8%	121	13.4%	22,110	18.6%	194,991
Idlib	4.2%	281	14.7%	24,255	13.6%	142,260
Hama	6.7%	449	7.1%	11,715	7.3%	76,568
Dara'a	1.6%	107	3.6%	5,940	6.7%	69,855
Ar-Raqqa	0.2%	13	0.8%	1,320	4.8%	50,253
Al-Hasakeh	1.1%	74	0.7%	1,155	2.4%	25,522
Deir-ez-zor	0.3%	20	1.1%	1,815	1.9%	20,273
Quneitra	0.0%	--	0.0%	--	0.8%	8,085
Lattakia	0.9%	60	0.6%	990	0.4%	4,312
Tartous	0.2%	13	0.2%	330	0.3%	3,064
As-Sweida	0.0%	--	0.0%	--	0.1%	659
Others	0.0%	--	0.0%	--	0.9%	9,170
Total		**6,699**		**165,003**		**1,100,486**
Source: UNHCR <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>						

Similar to the Palestinian experience, it was the rapid intensification of a localized struggle that prompted the Syrian refugee crisis. The flight of Syrians began soon after the demonstrations against Assad's government militarized in late 2010 and early 2011. As the situation engulfed the Syrian landscape, Lebanon was impacted almost immediately, most notably with the regime's May 2011 siege of Talkalakh, a town less than 10 km from the northern Lebanese border. As the fighting spread through eastern Syrian from 2011, communities adjacent to Lebanon moved into the country *en masse*. As Table 3 indicates, the vast majority of the early refugees came from Homs, with later numbers from Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib and elsewhere. The arrival of refugees has followed the patterns of conflict, with a first wave in 2011 settling in the north around Tripoli and a second from March 2012 largely from Homs, Qusayr, Hama, and, later, Damascus, settling in the Bekaa.

As suggested by these settlement patterns, the Palestinian community had been largely "quarantined" within or around the UNRWA-run camp structure while the settlement of the Syrian refugee community has been more dispersed. For instance, UNHCR officials have noted that wealthier Syrians have settled in Beirut and around Mt Lebanon, often renting apartments in more affluent areas whilst the poorer refugees, the vast bulk of the community, have settled in the North, the Bekaa and to a lesser extent the South.[19] This

[19] Anonymous interview with author, May 2014.

is coupled with the extensive familial links that the Syrian refugee community has within Lebanon, where families have either moved in with or close to relatives in the north and east. The Lebanese government fostered this focus on settlement in the east and north. According to the head of the International Commission of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Lebanon, this was based on a view that the region "is mostly Sunni and, therefore, communities that can receive these displaced people much more easily than in the Bekaa".[20]

Also, there has been a noted demographic shift in the refugees since the 2011/2012 period. Initially, groups were largely women and children, however as the conflict has dragged on an ever-increasing percentage of men have joined the refugee movements. This is also reflected in the changing spread of refugees where the more affluent groups, settling on the coast near Beirut and Mt Lebanon, have come as complete family units whilst those in the camps still are more disproportionately weighted in the favour of women and children.

The Palestinian community entered Lebanon *en masse* seeking refugee from what was in effect a short regional war. In this sense, the influx was sharp and thus the response more immediate. In particular, the camp system established from the early days of UNWRA's presence, served to symbolize the distinct nature of the community. The camp system continues to serve as a physical and symbolic assertion of this difference, despite the inevitable inter-mingling of lives and economies around the peripheries of, in particular, the urban camps. The UNRWA mandate effectively enforced a non-integration stance and affirmed the right of return. This acted in concert with the dynamics of Lebanon's own political system in which the Christian dominated state was inherently uneasy with the implantation of a settler body of mainly Sunni Muslims, and served to further isolate the refugees.[21]

The conflict and resultant refugee crisis from Syria followed a different course, with a rapid devolution into full-scale civil war from 2011, mutating into a regional conflict. The sectarian dimensions of the war, the brutality of both government and opposition tactics and the long-standing sectarian, communal and familial links between the two states dictated that Lebanon was an inevitable destination for those seeking shelter from the Syrian implosion. At this juncture, Lebanon was mired in its own political stalemate with the collapse of the Saad Hariri-led government in June 2011 and political inertia under the caretaker administration of Najib Mikati to February 2014.

[20] Hala Naufal, *Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: the Humanitarian Approach under Political Divisions*, (San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute, 2013/13), p. 4.

[21] Muhammad Ali Khalidi, *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon* (Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2002), p. 2.

The Syrian refugee community that arrived as a result of this conflict is larger, is more divided, has arrived over a longer period of time, has not been encamped, and shares more in the way of familial and personal affiliations with the Lebanese host community. Unlike the Palestinian refugees of the mid-20th century, the Syrian refugee community has a range of sectarian and familial ties upon which it can also draw. In relation to encampment, the initially partisan nature of the response to Syrian refugees in Lebanon saw Hezbollah successfully pressure the Mikati government to refuse the installation of camps in order to "avoid strain on the Bashar al Assad regime".[22] This has fostered the dispersal of the refugee community. Coupled with the vast number of arrivals, this has led the UNHCR to rely heavily on local and international humanitarian and charitable agencies for the delivery of aid. Therefore, where the Palestinian community existed in a highly regulated, UNRWA-run camp environment, the Syrian community has direct contact with the Lebanese community, often staying with family or other associates, is able to move freely around most parts of the country, and is subject to a variety of influences and pressures due to the unregulated environment.

To draw the significance of this comparison into sharper relief, the Palestinian community expelled from their homes in 1948 arrived as a relatively homogenous community. The Palestinian question, imported into Lebanon through the arrival of refugees, was not synthesized into the politics of the state. Without question, the Palestinian presence served to powerfully destabilise Lebanon, especially after the arrival of the PLO leadership and its determination to use Lebanese territory as a staging ground for incursions against Israel. However, the state response of exclusion, backed by societal consensus and strengthened in the aftermath of the civil war, kept the Palestinian problem in Lebanon as a distinctly foreign challenge. The demarcation of political identity, Lebanese or Palestinian, remained clear.

This situation can be contrasted against the social and political response to the Syrian refugees. The division between political identities amid Lebanese and Syrians is historically fluid and, unlike the Palestinians, this refugee community has not arrived *en masse* as a distinct group. Rather the Syrians have tricked, and then flooded, across the border, bringing with them Syria's sectarian challenges enmeshed with Lebanon's own. In the medium to long-term, this presents a much sharper challenge to Lebanon as exclusion is not a viable option. It can be argued that the Palestinian threat to Lebanon, especially after 1990, was literally contained in the camp system. The community today exists in political limbo, alienated from the so-called peace process and still intrinsically foreign after decades in Lebanon. Even as a political symbol, the camps operate as a constant reminder of the difference of the Palestinian

[22] Hala Naufal, Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: the Humanitarian Approach under Political Divisions, p. 7.

community. The Cairo Accord, which afforded the Palestinians control of the security situation inside the camps, in effect worked to further draw the distinction between the two communities who viewed each other with distrust. While this dire state of affairs provides little in the way of hope for the Palestinian community, it has offered Lebanon the opportunity to attempt to exert its own national identity. By the exclusion and isolation of the Palestinians, Lebanon has defined itself.[23]

By contrast, the deeper familial and personal links between Syria and Lebanon mean Syrian refugees have not been excluded from Lebanese society to the same extent as Palestinians with mixed outcomes. Whilst Lebanon is still not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees there has been "remarkable solidarity toward the refugee population".[24] Indeed, up to early 2014 the Lebanese government operated largely in concert with the Convention and Protocol as well as adhering to UNHCR standards on granting of at least temporary residence to the refugees as well as extending a range of social services to the Syrian refugee community that have not been granted to the Palestinian refugee community.[25] This has seen the Lebanese government work actively with the UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies such as the ICRC and Caritas in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, there is an increasingly 'ambivalent hospitality' emerging due to the strain this has placed on the country, with the prevention of encampment and increasing discussion of limiting any future refugee intakes now a more visible feature of Lebanese political debate.[26]

Laws pertaining to foreigners which have ensured Palestinian disenfranchisement formally apply to Syrians, yet familial networks and the consequent ability to integrate into the non-official labour market are easier to access for the Syrian community. Indeed, where the World Bank has assessed the Syrian refugee influx as "severely and negatively impacting the Lebanese economy"[27], senior Lebanese officials have argued that this view is overstated and the current economic malaise in the country has its roots in the political instability from 2008 and 2011. Further to this, they argue that the negative

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[23] Simon Haddad, *The Palestinian Impasse in Lebanon: The Politics of Refugee Integration*, (London, Sussex Academic Press, 2003); Rex Brynen and Roula el-Rifai, *Palestinian Refugees: Challenges of Repatriation and Development*, (London, IB Tauris: 2007).

[24] Roger Zetter, Héloïse Ruaudel, Sarah Deardorff-Miller, Eveliina Lyytinen, and Cameron Thibos, *The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme: Mapping and meta-analysis of existing studies of costs, impacts and protection* (Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 4 February 2014), p. 3.

[25] Hala Naufal, Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: the Humanitarian Approach under Political Divisions, p. 12.

[26] Roger Zetter, et.al., *The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme*, p. 3.

[27] World Bank, *Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*, (Washington DC: World Bank, September 2013), p. 3.

economic impacts are isolated, at least in the short term, with some positive effects in the decline of labour and operating costs, the influx of capital in the form of rents as well as consumption of food and other goods.[28] This is clearly not sustainable in the long term, with a growing income-expenditure gap where average expenses for refugee families of USD520 per month are vastly outstripping average monthly incomes of USD250.[29] This has not fully impacted by early 2014, as it has been underwritten by the sale of personal items. Therefore, where both the Palestinian and Syrian communities face the legal hurdles in finding employment, the Lebanese government has provided a slightly more flexible arrangement for the Syrian community where they can renew their residency permit. This is a prohibitively expensive process for the poorer refugees. However, employment options in the unofficial labour market, some 30% of the Lebanese economy, allows for the prospect for some income generation in the short term.[30]

As such, there are key distinctions between the arrival and settlement patterns of each group, that have affected the way they have or have not integrated with the host community. In particular, the size of the Syrian refugee community has overwhelmed the capacity of the Lebanese state to either isolate them, as was the case with the Palestinians, or fully absorb them. In addition, the deep familial and personal links between the Syrian and Lebanese communities fostered the dispersal of the refugees throughout the country. Finally, UNRWA administration of the Palestinian community allowed the Lebanese authorities to isolate and exceptionalize this community whilst UNHCR administration of the Syrian community has made this more difficult.

Refugees and Conflict Spill-Over

The spill-over of conflict serves as another key area of comparison through which the two case-studies can be explored. The reality of the Lebanese experience has been near-perpetual conflict, linked to the instability of the state structure and the state of regional politics. The Palestinian role in Lebanon's civil war is well documented. The determination of the PLO to stage incursions against Israel also -without question- drew Israeli responses, most notably in 1978 and 1982. However, the role that the Palestinians played in regional conflict, as distinct to their role in domestic conflict, is significant.

In this period, Lebanese opposition to Israel spanned the confessional spectrum. The morality of the Palestinian fight was unquestioned. Despite the compromises made in the Cairo Accord, the agreement broadly reflects the shared Lebanese belief in the right of the Palestinians to armed resistance.

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[28] Anonymous interview with author, May 2014.

[29] Roger Zetter, et.al., *The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme,* p. 14.

[30] World Bank, *Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*, p. 6.

This is further strengthened by the regional Arab consensus for armed confrontation. However, while Palestinian militancy did in fact draw Israel into attacking Lebanon this occurred parallel to the experience of internal Lebanese instability and was not a cause of that conflict. In the lead up to the civil war, it was internal Lebanese issues - including the assertiveness of the Palestinian community - which precipitated conflict.

However, in terms of spill-over, it is undeniable that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon triggered the Israeli invasions in both 1978 and 1982. Even allowing for Israel's geo-strategic agenda vis-à-vis the desire for a Christian regime in Beirut, the main catalyst for conflict was the armed Palestinian presence. This culminated with the siege of Beirut and the subsequent (albeit incomplete) Israeli withdrawal in the aftermath of the PLO's departure for North Africa. Moreover, as Hezbollah continued the fight into the 2000s, it was the armed Hezbollah presence which precipitated the 2006 conflict. This clearly demonstrates that the presence of an armed militia movement, determined to attack Israel, will lead to conflict. However, Israel, in these contexts, invaded as a unified state-based military force. It can be argued that this is not strictly spill-over, more a determined action by a neighbour state to invade Lebanese territory in the pursuit of political and military objectives (of Syria in which the internal Syrian issue sucks in Lebanon).

As was discussed above, the instigation of Palestinian political and military activity in Lebanon from the late 1960s saw the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dragged northward onto its neighbour's territory. This has repeated itself in relation to the Syrian conflict with a number of small-scale skirmishes in and around the northern city of Tripoli as well as the targeting of rival groups in the Bekaa and on the border region. This speaks to the broader issue of similarities in the confessional composition of the refugee communities and how this relates to Lebanon's well-documented susceptibility to the machinations of its neighbours.[31] In terms of the relationship between confessional composition and conflict, both refugee communities are largely, and in the Palestinian case now almost exclusively, Sunni Muslim. This raises clear questions over the viability of the confessional system should the Syrian community move toward some form of permanent settlement in Lebanon. Indeed, with little to indicate that the situation in Syria will stabilize, a return to Syria is unlikely. The demarcation between Lebanon and Syria that in the colonial period was in effect premised on the Christian nature of the Lebanese state will be unalterably diluted. This will challenge Christian-Muslim and intra-Muslim power calculations. As the increasing violence inside Lebanon demonstrates, the Sunni/Hezbollah tensions that permeate Lebanese politics are strained by the Syrian refugee presence. As Hezbollah's leadership has committed the

[31] Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

organization to fight alongside Assad's forces in Syria, continued retribution from Sunni militias inside Lebanon is highly likely. This intra-Muslim conflict, a feature of contemporary Lebanese politics, has only been exacerbated by the Syrian crisis.

A clear example of this can be seen in the potential for partisan groups from Syria establishing a presence amongst the refugee community. The border region surrounding the Bekaa has been highly porous, serving as the main corridor for the movement of people out of Syria since 2011. In addition to this, the region had seen the flow of radical Sunni groups from Syria since the 1980s, often pushed by the Assad regime, which had established networks in the north and east of Lebanon.[32] With the outbreak of fighting on the border region, where the North and Bekaa generally have refugee populations more sympathetic to the opposition in Syria, with the vast majority of refugees from Hamah, Homs, Qusayr corridor, the Bekaa region became the major lay station for Free Syrian Army fighters as well as members of a variety of radical Sunni groups. The situation changed with the battle of Qusayr from February to April 2012 when Hezbollah formalised their involvement in the Syrian conflict and, concurrently, started to confront anti-Assad forces in Lebanon.

As such, whilst there has not been a full-scale spill-over of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon as of mid-2014, the ramifications of the conflict are sharply felt throughout all sectors of Lebanese society. This differs, in some respect, to the experience of spill-over from the Arab-Israeli conflict that saw Lebanon drawn directly into the conflict, including two invasions by Israel in 1978 and 1982 as well as numerous armed confrontations between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah since the end of the war. Granted, Syria had occupied Lebanon from the end of the civil war in 1990 to 2005. However, and perhaps counter-intuitively, Lebanon has been able to resist being dragged into the Syrian conflict to date despite the closer links between the Lebanese and Syrian communities as opposed to the Lebanese and Palestinian communities.

Refugee Politics in Lebanon

Perhaps the most important area where the impact of the Palestinian refugee crisis could yield an understanding on how the current emergency could influence the propensity for conflict is the issue of refugee politics in Lebanon. Indeed, one may posit that concern over how the factors relating to demographics, settlement, legal status, and economic impacts are framed within the broader discourse on the confessional political structure of Lebanon. For the Palestinians, this has been a history of exclusion and political exploitation. In the post-civil war period, Lebanese from across the confessional spectrum have shared a consensus that the future of Palestinians will not be in Lebanon. However, this long-standing political challenge is not without its benefits for

[32] Joseph Bahout, "Lebanon at the Brink: The Impact of the Syrian Civil War", p. 3.

Lebanese politics. As Peteet has argued, 'the Palestinian presence, perceived as a problem, can and does serve as a common denominator in unifying often disparate elements of the Lebanese polity'.[33] This consensus is formally reflected in the 1990 constitution and informally through various surveys of Lebanese attitudes undertaken in the years since. Lebanon's official line has always been that Palestinians cannot be integrated into Lebanese society for a range of inter-related reasons: the original intention was to provide safe haven for a refugee community displaced by war, not to offer a location for permanent resettlement, Lebanon's demographic balance and the consequences of the naturalization of 400,000 mainly Sunni Palestinians, the limited economic resources of the state to absorb a refugee community of this size and, most powerfully, a sense that naturalization of the Palestinian community provides what is seen as an Israeli and international problem with a Lebanese solution. It appears this rejection of forced settlement is often couched as a defence of Palestinian rights, notably the seminal right of return. As Meier points out, the denial of Palestinian rights allows Lebanon to "pretend to guarantee their right of return".[34]

As mentioned, in order to forestall this outcome a significant and restrictive array of rights have been denied to Palestinians in Lebanon. Despite some relaxation in 2005, the Lebanese system is still fundamentally designed to exclude Palestinians. Simon Haddad has conclusively demonstrated that large sections of the Lebanese community favour the granting of basic rights to the Palestinian community in Lebanon. However, full political rights have been a red line for Lebanon, ever aware of the delicacy of its confessional balance and the impact on key voting districts of a mass increase in Sunni voters. As such, the 444,480 registered Palestinians who today reside in Lebanon equal roughly 10% of the population.[35] The 12 camps still houses roughly 53% of the refugee population and according to UNWRA, of its five fields of operations; Lebanon has the highest percentage of Palestine refugees living in abject poverty.[36]

In comparison, there are points of unity and disunity in the response of Lebanese political elites to the Syrian refugee crisis. The most evident difference is the division amongst Christian political elites to the issue, where the Christian members of the March 14 (Lebanese Forces and Kataib) and March 8 (Free Patriotic Movement - FPM) coalitions have taken divergent stances. For members of March 8, their view is shaped by Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime and efforts to resist the extension of the Sunni Future

[33] Julie Peteet, "From refugees to a minority, Palestinians in post-war Lebanon", *Middle East Report*, Issue 200 1996, p. 23.

[34] Daniel Meier, "Al-tawteen: the implantation problem as an idiom of the Palestinian presence in post-civil war Lebanon", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2010, p. 145.

[35] UNRWA, "Where we work" <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>

[36] UNRWA, "Where we work" <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>

Movement's power. This is a somewhat ironic stance given the FPM's leader, Michael Aoun, was exiled at the end of the civil war due to his open confrontation to Syrian occupation.[37] Aoun and the FPM have sought to reconcile this apparent contradiction by arguing that the Syrian regime is essential to protect minority (read Christian) rights against US-Saudi efforts to push for Sunni domination and the eventual naturalisation of the Palestinian population, redrawing the confessional map of the state. March 8 follows the Hezbollah line that the Assad regime is a guarantor of minority rights as well as a bulwark against Israel. For the Lebanese Forces and Kataib, their stance has led to tacit support for the Syrian opposition framed by their opposition to Hezbollah and combined with an effort at keeping Lebanon apart from the turmoil in Syria. As such, they are not openly resistant to the refugee influx, as are members of the FPM, but are not favourable to permanent settlement. This also represents an irony whereby key members of the March 14 coalition, a grouping that ostensibly represents "Western" interests in Lebanon, is either actively or passively supporting opposition groups in Syria that contain al-Qaeda-linked organisations.

The Syrian refugee crisis has therefore put the Christian parties in Syria in a dilemma. On the one hand, they can take the FPM line of backing the Assad regime. However, this raises issues around the marginalisation of the Christian parties during the post-war Syrian occupation of Lebanon (1990-2005) and proximity to a regime that has been alleged to have engaged in serious violations of human rights. On the other hand, they can take the LFP/Kataib position of tacitly supporting the opposition. However, this aligns these parties with a number of groups, from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood through to far more radical and violent groups in both Syria and Lebanon, who have, in the case of the radical groups, openly threatened the future viability of the enshrinement of Christian power in the Lebanese system. This is a critical dilemma for the Christian parties, but one that might have the somewhat perverse outcome of preventing the collapse of the political system where the presence of extremist opposition movements from Syria in Lebanon has created room for compromise between the dominant parties within each coalition during negotiations over the stalled electoral process of 2013-2014. Here, Hezbollah and the Future Movement are able to bring their divided Christian coalition partners along to ensure the exclusion of new political players, shoring up the confessional structure in the country.

This is a surprising development given the political malaise that Lebanon has endured since key events in 2008, 2011, and 2013. The Lebanese government remains in limbo despite the creation of the interim government under independent Tammam Salam in February 2014, almost a year after the

[37] Benjamin MacQueen *Political Culture and Conflict Resolution in the Arab World: Lebanon and Algeria* (Melbourne: MUP, 2009), p. 47.

collapse of Nijab Mikati's government in March 2013. Salam's government is a delicate balance of both March 8 and March 14 members as well as independents, with the former two groups actively working to undermine each other in the lead-up to the 2014 presidential and legislative elections. As such, with the rapid increase of refugees through 2013 and into 2014, the Lebanese state lacked an official decision-making institution and members of the governing institutions seek to destroy the other.

Despite this, the dominant members of the March 8 and March 14 coalitions, Hezbollah and the Future Movement, have to some extent put aside ambitions of political domination in favour of cooperation to prevent the complete collapse of the system of governance in Lebanon. For example, whilst the deadlock over the appointment of a new President remains as of mid-2014, neither group has sought to take advantage of the demographic, political, or economic pressures of the refugee crisis for political gain in this key decision.[38] Heated debate over the candidacy of Samir Geagea and the prospective rival candidacy of Michel Aoun is present, but these have consciously avoided using the refugee crisis for political gain.

From a Political Crisis to a National Crisis

Whilst the impacts of such an overwhelming refugee influx are severe, and the lessons of 1970-1975 are critical in viewing the current situation in Lebanon, there are important differences between the two refugee crises that are important to note. The differences in the size of the refugee communities, arrival and settlement patterns, the contrasting legal status of the two communities within Lebanon, the different spill-over dynamics of the "push" conflicts on the host society, and the particular nature of refugee politics toward the Palestinian community as opposed to the Syrian community have created two related but also contrasting phenomena.

Indeed, it may be argued that the combination of these factors in relation to the Syrian refuge crisis, particularly the scale of the crisis coupled with the intimate links between the Lebanese and Syrian communities, has made this an issue that cannot be politicized. In other words, it has moved from a potential political crisis to a full-scale national crisis. The division of the Christian parties over this issue, but their acquiescence to the directives of the dominant partners in the March 8 and 14 coalitions is a clear example of this. Early flirtations with politicising the refugee issue by both sides were evident, with March 8 taking a hard line against refugee settlement and March 14 seeking to harness their support. However, Hezbollah's securing of the key border area around Qusayr in 2013 and 2014, coupled with an effort to avoid alienating necessary Christian allies has seen them temper their stance whilst the Fu-

[38] Vidya Kauri, "Lebanon parliament fails to elect president", *Al Jazeera,* 23 April, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/lebanon-nominate-president-201442365922519100.html>

ture Movement has backed away from promoting political activism amongst the refugee community as it fears the emergence of unpredictable extremist groups in Lebanese territory as well as acceding to Christian demands to keep Lebanon at arm's length from the Syrian crisis. In short, the severity of the crisis has led to a change from a potentially political crisis to a national crisis, forcing compromise, at least in the short term, amongst Lebanon's political factions.

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