Université Sorbonne Paris Nord

ECOLE DOCTORALE ERASME

Institut de Droit public, Sciences politiques et sociales

Doctorat en sociologie

International actors in the governance of Syrian refugees in Lebanon: an analysis of the depoliticisation and repoliticisation of humanitarian and border interventions

Clothilde FACON

Thèse dirigée par Pr. Antoine Pécoud

Soutenue le 19 juin 2023

Jury :

M. Kamel Dorai, Chargé de recherche, CNRS

Mme Catherine Fabregoule, Maîtresse de conférences-HDR, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord

MCF HDR en droit public

Mme Tamirace Fakhoury, Associate Professor, Aalborg University - rapporteure

Mme Mona Fawaz, Professor, American University of Beirut

M. Thomas Lacroix, Directeur de recherche, CNRS - rapporteur

M. Antoine Pécoud, Professeur, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord

M. Franck Petiteville, Professeur, IEP de Grenoble - président

Abstract:

This thesis focuses on international actors' responses to Syrian refugee arrivals in Lebanon since 2011. It aims to show that depoliticisation is a key modality of these foreign interventions, structuring their discursive space and leading to the legitimisation of their existence. I argue that this depoliticisation is deeply rooted in the hegemony of the 'weakness paradigm' to describe the Lebanese state, a paradigm relying on a set of simplistic assumptions that 'pathologise' and technicise the state by framing it as absent, afflicted by fragmentation and bad governance. Both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development have established a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, neutrality claims and vulnerability politics. This research provides empirical grounding to the idea that depoliticisation and repoliticisation coexist in a dialectical relation, and that repoliticisation can have disruptive effects. Indeed, despite an initial structural imbalance of power between the Lebanese government and the international community, the presence of refugees was used by the former to gain leverage. Finally, I argue that Gulf donors and organisations challenge the assumption that international actors are obliged to perform depoliticisation to gain legitimacy: for them, the recourse to politicisation and to religious humanitarianism is a means to access the field and legitimise their interventions without fully integrating into the UN structures.

Cette thèse porte sur les réponses des acteurs internationaux aux arrivées de réfugiés syriens au Liban depuis 2011. Elle vise à montrer que la dépolitisation est une modalité clé de ces interventions, qui structure leur espace discursif et conduit à la légitimation de leur existence. Je soutiens que cette dépolitisation est profondément ancrée dans l'hégémonie du « paradigme de la faiblesse » pour décrire l'État libanais, un paradigme reposant sur un ensemble d'hypothèses réductrices qui « pathologisent » et technicisent l'État en le présentant comme absent, miné par la fragmentation et la mauvaise gouvernance. Le Haut Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés et le Centre International pour le Développement des Politiques Migratoires ont établi un continuum de signifiants et de labels politiques articulés autour de l'absence d'État, de leurs revendications de neutralité et des politiques de vulnérabilité. Cette recherche valide sur le plan empirique l'idée selon laquelle la dépolitisation et la repolitisation entretiennent une relation dialectique. La repolitisation a des conséquences concrètes : en effet, malgré un déséquilibre initial et structurel de pouvoir entre le gouvernement libanais et la communauté internationale, la présence des réfugiés a été instrumentalisée par le premier pour

augmenter son pouvoir de négociation. Enfin, je montre que les donateurs et les organisations du Golfe remettent en cause l'hypothèse selon laquelle les acteurs internationaux sont obligés d'avoir recours à la dépolitisation pour gagner en légitimité : en ce qui les concerne, le recours à une forme de politisation et à l'humanitarisme religieux est un moyen d'accéder au terrain et de légitimer leurs interventions sans s'intégrer pleinement dans les structures de l'ONU.

Table of contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

AFD: Agency Française de Développement

BCC : Border Control Committee

BCPs: border crossing points

CEDRE: Economic conference for the development of Lebanon through reforms and with businesses

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

EC: European Commission

ENP: European Neighbourhood Policy

ESCWA: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

EU : European Union

GIZ: German Development Agency (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)

GoL: Government of Lebanon

GSO: General Security Offices

IBM: International Border Management

ICMPD: International Centre for Migration Policy Development

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation

IO: International Organisation

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

ISF : International Security Forces

KSRelief: King Salman Relief and Humanitarian Assistance Centre

LAF: Lebanese Armed Forces

LCRP : Lebanon Crisis Response Plan

MBRGI: Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives

MEHE: Ministry of Education and Higher Education

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoDP: Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs

MOSA : Ministry of Social Affairs

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

QWIDS: Query Wizard for International Development Statistics

RSD: Refugee Status Determination

UAE: United Arab Emirates

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNIFIL: United Nations Interim Force

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

URDA: Union of Relief and Development Associations

WFP : World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION

More than a decade after the beginning of Syrian refugee arrivals in Lebanon, following the repression led by Bashar al-Assad's forces, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offices in Tripoli, in the north of the country, continue to be housed in precarious prefabs. Located at the entrance to the city, this imposing yet flimsy-looking structure has, since 2011, been in charge of registering a few hundred thousand refugees, providing them with material and legal assistance, and conducting resettlement interviews for their eventual departures to third countries. The spatial organisation of this building reflects the diversity of its missions. The offices are separated from the refugee reception area by a long corridor, itself divided into three zones: one dedicated to waiting (where a TV shows general information and examples of 'refugee success stories'), another to reception and needs assessments, and the last, to the biopolitical practices of biometric screening via fingerprinting and iris recognition 'to make sure that the same person does not claim aid in different centres'.[1] This combination of humanitarian and security apparatus is now commonplace in field operations of this UN agency.

At the end of 2018, a UNHCR officer told me that the precarious aspect of these premises was 'a way to show to the Lebanese that we won't be staying here' and that 'the presence of the UNHCR, like that of Syrian refugees, is not going to last'.[2] A risky claim to make, given that the rampant insecurity stemming from atrocities perpetrated by the Syrian regime has dragged on since 2011,[3] and the regime has shown multiple signs of being reluctant to allow refugees to return.[4] However, the prospect of such a return is prevalent in the official narrative of both the international community and the Lebanese government, as though it were an inevitable horizon for their action; thus, the reception policies in place stop at emergency measures, and there is no long-term vision of the Syrian presence.

---

1 Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Tripoli office, Tripoli, 02 December 2018.
2 Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Tripoli office, Tripoli, 02 December 2018.
3 The UNHCR regularly reiterates its position that security and humanitarian conditions in Syria are far from being satisfactory for refugee return (UNHCR 2018a).
4 In April 2018, the Syrian regime passed Law 10, which gives way to expropriating Syrian families from their house before their return.

This officer's choice of words emphasises the fact that the UNHCR's presence is under scrutiny, sometimes controversial, and that the organisation remains mindful of its image. Though it is only one element (among myriad others) of the international response to the Syrian 'crisis', in the public eye it is emblematic of this response, and its presence is particularly visible across the country's landscape, the armoured UN vehicles displaying a form of opulence in the streets of Beirut. This is true in particular of the working-class district of Jnah, home to the organisation's imposing Beirut offices, within walking distance of the Palestinian refugee camps in which many Syrian families are accommodated. While this visibility may have bestowed upon the UNHCR a form of credit for actions that are, in reality, often performed by other actors, it has also come under fire: the UNHCR is perceived as the invisible hand of an iniquitous regime which 'contains' refugees in Syrian border countries while preventing them from migrating to a European continent that has, as of 2023, taken just 3% of refugees from Syria.[5] In June 2017, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Gebran Bassil threatened to freeze UNHCR employee visas, accusing them of having a 'hidden agenda' of keeping refugees in Lebanon while deterring them from returning to Syria. The latest polemic: in January 2022, the UNHCR office posted a message in Arabic on Facebook & Twitter, warning refugees against the danger of departures from the Tripoli coastline, from which boats undertake the perilous journey to Cyprus. A communication initiative that was harshly criticised, as living conditions in Lebanon are worsening at a bewildering pace.

The 'Syrian crisis'[6] is considered by the UN to be the most pressing humanitarian emergency since the end of World War II. In 2011, A Syrian popular and peaceful uprising was violently repressed by Bachar al-Assad's regime; during the following years, the repression continued as well as violent armed confrontations between pro and anti-regimes with multiple regional and international actors involved, including Hezbollah (in support of the regime). The destruction of Syria provoked economic collapsing with considerable humanitarian, health and educational consequences, with 90% of the Syrian population living below the poverty line in 2022 (OCHA Syria report 2022). Since 2011, more than 500.000 Syrians have been killed, close to 8 million (half of the population) have been displaced within their own country, and a 6 million have

---

[5] Source: UNHCR data finder, available at: https://rsq.unhcr.org/#_ga=2.102864384.1897062127.1664119757-1687219761.1645629638 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
6 The term 'crisis' is itself polemical: I use it for convenience, though with critical distancing. Allusion to a 'refugee crisis' implies that refugees are the problem, while in reality I am referring to a crisis of 'hospitality' and international solidarity.

found refuge in third countries, with 90% of them now in neighbouring countries (UNHCR Syria report 2021).

Turkey took 3.7 million Syrian refugees, and Jordan 650.000. Lebanon is now accommodating 1.5 million Syrians (as well as the 250.000 Palestinian refugees already there by 2011), among a total population of 5 million – the largest number of refugees per capita in the world (UNHCR 2022a). In the first years of the conflict, the 'land of Cedar' managed to weather the storm, thanks to its preparedness capacity (having experienced so many humanitarian crises) but these arrivals have placed increasing strain on the infrastructure and social cohesion of a country still marked by memories of its occupation by the Syrian army (which only ended in 2005), which exacerbated political polarisation. Because Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, Syrians do not have refugee status. They are commonly referred to using the controversial term *tawteen*, sometimes translated as 'settlement of non-Lebanese' or 'naturalisation', or of *nazihin*, which means 'temporarily displaced'.

This PhD thesis focuses on the role of international actors in the governance of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. I am interested in the practices, processes, rationalities and discourses underpinning this governance, which I conceive as a 'know-how' (*savoir-pouvoir,* Foucault 1972) apparatus. By examining different levels of discourse and practices, from field actors to figures closer to decision-making, my work seeks to illustrate the diversity and hybrid nature of governance processes. By international actors, I mean those who have enjoyed some degree of influence over the Lebanese response – namely the United Nations (UN) and its agencies, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) but also major donors. The top funding contributors are the European Union (EU) and its member states (in particular France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries), the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Japan, Australia and Switzerland. The top non-traditional bilateral donors are Gulf countries: Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), all four of which are 'top twenty' actors in the donor rankings. I also include such international organisations and international NGOs as the International Centre for Migration Policy Developments (ICMPD), which is in charge of border cooperation, the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM), the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

'Refugee governance' refers to the policies, programmes and structures elaborated and implemented by states in order to manage and control the entry and exit (as well as, where applicable, integration and protection) of cross-border forced migrants. It tends to implement a state of emergency, facilitating external control, and it involves multiple actors. Migration and refugee governance has increasingly been delegated to technical entities, be they INGOs or UN bodies (such as the IOM or the UNHCR). Notions such as governance and management fall within technocratic and apolitical meaning systems, whose ideological tenets should be deconstructed. I will also employ the widest notion of 'refugee regime complex' (Betts & Loescher 2011), which amounts to the principles, norms and decision-making processes mobilised by players in the international system so as to influence the treatment of refugees.

The narrative surrounding the Syrian response is generally that of the Lebanese state's disengagement from hosting refugees (having neither the necessary capacity nor the political agreement) while the UN took over reception policies for refugees as a result of the strong mobilisation of European donors, motivated by the prospect of preventing Syrians from reaching Europe. The willingness to externalise European borders to the Near East would mean supporting a Lebanese state characterised as 'weak', 'absent' or 'irrelevant', whose borders were porous, and which was already facing urgent challenges – such as threats of territorial spillover from neighbouring conflicts, severe economic constraints, limited access to water and electricity, and a waste crisis.

Indeed, Lebanese authorities initially played a relatively passive role in crafting policy responses to Syrian arrivals; this attitude was described as a 'policy of no policy' (El Mufti 2014). In 2011, they retained the existing open border regime between Lebanon and Syria (which had been implemented through bilateral agreements since the 1990s), under which Syrians could travel freely to, and work in, Lebanon. Similarly, the 'non-encampment policy' – through which the Lebanese government has consistently opposed the establishment of formal UNHCR-run refugee camps – illustrates a fairly passive approach. A large part of responsibility for the response was delegated to the international community (understood as a coalition of UN organisations and Western states), which responded with substantial donor contributions of 8.8 billion USD. This amount includes 4.5 billion USD under the 2017-2020 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), the support plan for the Syrian response, which, via the Ministry of

Health, Education and Social Affairs, combines the efforts of the Lebanese government with those of both UN agencies (WFP, HCR, UNICEF and UNDP) and several local NGOs.[7]

Some of this money was used to provide humanitarian assistance and development aid aimed at preventing further deterioration of living conditions for the most vulnerable populations. The UNHCR in particular has played the role of a 'surrogate state' – as has been the case by the past and in other Middle Eastern countries (Kagan 2011) – in charge of implementing a system of refugee selection, registration and reception (Janmyr 2018). Contrary to many UNHCR countries of operation where international interventions have aimed to create or strengthen the states' asylum bureaucracy and assistance capacities, in Lebanon the bulk of foreign funds has bypassed a state perceived as too weak and corrupted. Alongside this, European donors have sent two billion USD to Lebanon for security assistance, including border management – mainly to improve the security of the land border with Syria, as well as that of Beirut airport and the port of Tripoli.[8]

However, this narrative rests on several implicit assumptions that are worth unpacking. The first of these concerns the supposed 'passivity' and lack of administrative and political 'capacity' of the Lebanese authorities, which operate *de facto* within the limits of a hybrid governance framework that is characterised by ambiguity, uncertainty and in the absence of reliable data, transparency or accountability. There is also very weak coordination between administrations – along with an assumption that nothing can be agreed upon because each is controlled by sectarian leaders, who are divided on the political chessboard. The ideology of this governance model might be described as *laissez-faire* (Lebanon Support 2019). Yet Stel (2020) posits that in putting their incapacities and ignorance on show, Lebanese authorities reveal their strategic thinking, and that this serves not only to bolster positions of power vis-à-vis political competitors, but also to discipline/control, exploit and expel specific populations. Likewise, Fakhoury (2017: 682) argues that despite its apparent lack of reply to the crisis, the Lebanese state has capitalised on its 'ingrained political repertoire, understood here as the types

---

[7] The LCRP gather 104 national and international partners and target 2,8 billion vulnerable people living in Lebanon. Sources: LCRP 2017-2020, available at: https://lebanon.un.org/en/102825-lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020; LCRP 2017-2021 update, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2021-2021-update; LCRP 2022-2023, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-2022-2023 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

[8] Security Assistance Monitor, 'Security Aid Pivot Table – Programs', Website, Security Assistance Monitor, 2012-2022, available at: http://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Lebanon [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

of interactions, norms, and routines that are inherent to the polity's governance mode'. In fact, this refusal to integrate refugees is consensual, right across the political spectrum. In the same vein, Kagan (2011) has shown that allowing the UNHCR to take on the role of a 'surrogate state' in charge of the refugee regime has a symbolic function for Middle Eastern governments, because it permits them to manage the existing contradiction between their formal refusal to long-term refugee settlement and the reality of their long-term presence. The UN then plays the useful role of 'sponsor', to whom responsibility for refugees the state refuses to integrate is delegated.

The second assumption limits the international response to both the UN complex and Western countries. Yet while 80% of the $1.1 billion of yearly funding reported by the UN comes from the USA and European countries,[9] Gulf donors' responses have also been substantial. At first sight, their policy of 'charity before hospitality' (Hitman 2019) follows the same externalisation logic as that of European countries. Yet their *modus operandi* are nonetheless deeply differentiated: Western and UN apparatus is defined by administrative complexity, cumbersome bureaucracy and disembodied procedures, whereas the 'Khaleeji model' (Tok 2015) of emerging donors is characterised by the weak institutionalisation of its intervention mechanisms, which operate mainly through the informal circuit of small Islamic charities. The distrust surrounding Arab donors' activities (because of both their 'religious humanitarianism' and suspicions that they support Islamic militancy) has marginalised them *vis-à-vis* the Western donor community. I will therefore investigate both their role and their relative lack of visibility. Thirdly, such representation underestimates the pivotal role played by a well-established national civil society – one that has been the first presence on the ground from the onset of the 'crisis', and has reaped the rewards of both its prolixity (with more than 5000 NGOs, Lebanon has the world's highest number of NGOs per capita, Abi Yaghi & Troit 2020: 169) and its proximity to the beneficiary population. These are organisations that tend to replace a structurally missing state, or at least complete some of its services, closely collaborating with UN agencies and international NGOs. Despite the fact that Lebanon and Syria have maintained a complex relationship since their independence, the Syrian conflict has 'unexpectedly revealed the extraordinary reservoirs of solidarity and mutual aid existing in Lebanese society 'outside' of the state – as though ordinary citizens (out of weariness or resignation) had become

---

[9] Source: Financial tracking service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. https://fts.unocha.org/countries/124/summary/2021 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

accustomed to functioning without it' (Geisser 2013: 67-84).[10] However, most of these NGOs and community-based organisations are excluded from the LCRP.

In attempting to grasp the role played by international actors, it is important not to fall into the trap of a 'Eurocentric' or ethnocentric reading of the Syrian response in Lebanon; one that is conducive to reductive understandings, seeing in this response only a result of European migratory policies aimed at keeping refugees far from its borders, while rendering invisible the role played by regional donors and national dynamics (which have shaped the response equally). To avoid this pitfall, it is of primordial importance that we take into consideration the prism of the migratory, political and socio-economic history of the country and its neighbour.

Lebanon has, in fact, found itself facing a great many emergency situations and these have – in addition to contributing to the establishment of a national humanitarian ecosystem (Troit & Yaghi 2020: 162-163) – also propagated its international image as a permanently crisis-stricken country, with the Great Famine of Mount Lebanon (1915-1918), the 1958 political crisis, the Civil War (1975-1990), the Qana massacre of 1996, Israeli attacks on the Lebanese territory in 1996 and 2006, and the conflict in the Palestinian camp of Nahr-el-Bared in 2007. The reception of refugees plays a key role in this historic: Armenians in 1916, Palestinians in 1948, Iraqis after 2003 and Syrians from 2011 onwards. The assistance needs generated by these multiple crises (and first and foremost by a particularly destructive civil war) have led a significant part of the society to structure itself around a real 'economy of poverty and assistance' (Picard 2016) comprising of NGOs dedicated to assistance and emergency aid, economic and social development and then, from the mid-1990s, human rights defence (Troit & Yaghi 2020: 163). In addition, since the end of 2019, Lebanon has undergone one of the worst economic recession in modern history, with a poverty rate going from 30% in 2019 to 75% in 2021 (82% when it comes to multidimensional poverty, ESCWA 2021; OCHA 2021c), the local currency having lost 99% of its original value and an inflation rate reaching 180% in 2022. The World Bank has classified it as one of the three most severe economic collapses worldwide since the 1850s, with a contraction of real GDP between 2019 and 2021 of 58% (World Bank 2021). This situation was deeply aggravated by the consequences of the August 4th blast and the COVID-19 pandemic.

---

[10] I translated French quotes from the literature and inteviewees to English.

In official rhetoric, the 'Palestinian syndrome' is often presented as the cornerstone of decisions taken by national and local authorities towards Syrian refugees. In a bid to avoid a repeat of the Palestinian experience (in which an initially temporary post-Nakba[11] settlement became long-term, and their presence was 'politicised', accused to have led to the civil war) these authorities did everything in their power to make the Syrians' existence more precarious while keeping it under strict control. They therefore opposed the establishment of camps (*non-encampment policy*) and strictly barred refugees from accessing the job market other than in the sectors of construction, cleaning and agriculture. In certain municipalities, local authorities also sporadically implemented curfews targeting Syrians exclusively.

Any analysis of the Syrian response should include the historicity of Lebanon and Syria's exchanges, and their relationship as 'intimate enemies' (Picard 2016). Picard has shown that the formation of the two states has remained 'unfulfilled' (17) and argues that 'since their creation nearly a century ago, Lebanon and Syria have never ceased to construct and re-construct their separate and interconnecting identities, seeking to be strangers to each other yet remaining intimate' (*ibid.*: 10). In 2005, massive protests across Lebanon put an end to fifteen years of occupation by Syrian troops. Since then, the political elite has continued to be split along the lines of a favourable or hostile position towards the Syrian regime, between the 8 March coalition (led by the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah), and the 14 March coalition (led by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri's Future Movement): 'taking advantage of an accelerated erosion of the Lebanese political arena, the Syrian war, which is fed on social fractures and conflicting identities, reverberated across the territory and into Lebanese social and political spaces' (*ibid.*: 23). Officially aimed at avoiding the Syrian conflict spilling over into Lebanon, the 'dissociation policy' towards regional conflicts (expressed in the 2012 Baabda declaration) was invoked as justification for refusal to recognise Syrians as refugees, as a way of remaining neutral in the Syrian conflict.

On another note, the Syrian presence cannot be viewed solely through the prism of the humanitarian crisis: there is a long history between the two countries of circulation as well as social and family ties (Picard 2016). During the 1990s, roughly 500.000 Syrian workers (mainly in the agricultural and construction sectors) benefited from freedom of movement to Lebanon

---

[11] Nakba means *catastrophe* – the term used to refer to the 1948 Palestinian exodus towards countries of the region.

(Chalcraft 2008). This pre-conflict anchoring has had a strong influence on exile routes and strategies.

Refugee governance also includes border management – in this case, with Syria and Cyprus. As an 'artificial colonial creation from the 1920s' (Chalcraft 2008: 2), the 375 km land border separating Lebanon and Syria is characterised by porosity and fluidity (Picard 2016: 334; Kaufman 2014) as well as a state vacuum, with Hezbollah holding military control in these 'grey zones' (Mouawad 2018: 9). Since the Syrian conflict, there has also been the added presence of humanitarian actors such as the Lebanese Red Cross or the UNHCR. Meanwhile, the 225 km maritime border with Cyprus is guarded by the Lebanese Navy, with the support of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL, originally in charge of guarding the Lebanese-Israeli border). These borders are governed by a 'hybrid security assemblage'; a complex hybridation between state and non-state actors[12] (Fregonese 2012), as well as between national and international actors (Tholens 2017), who operate with neither consultation nor any common strategy.

2014 marked a turning point in the Lebanese government's response, when the initially lax approach seemed to be replaced by increased control. The 'October policies' of 2014 thus included measures designed to halt the Syrian inflow, encourage Syrians to return, and monitor and control the presence of Syrians already living in Lebanon. The legal framework governing their presence shifted from a preferential to a discriminatory regime, making access to the job market, housing and documentation particularly challenging. In January 2015, these measures were followed by increasingly restrictive regulations governing their residency. In May 2015, the Ministerial Cabinet officially requested that the UNHCR stop registering refugees from Syria as of that same month.[13] Precarious social and statutory conditions have prompted some refugees to return to Syria.

Several situational factors have been put forward to explain such a turnaround on the part of the Lebanese authorities. First, the number of the UNHCR-registered refugees had, by September 2014, reached 1.2 billion – a symbolic 25% population increase, as was stressed by the UNHCR at the time. Second, the northern Beqaa valley came under attack from the then-

---

[12] The beneficiaries of this project are the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF); General Security (GSO), in charge of intelligence and border movements; Internal Security Forces (ISF); and Customs.
[13] As of this date, the UNHCR could register Syrians as 'people of concern' (Janmyr 2017).

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN), which had killed dozens of Lebanese soldiers. These incidents, combined with rising tension between refugees and host communities and a series of security crackdowns, led to Syrian refugees being depicted as an 'existential threat' by the political class and some of the national media. Regardless of the actual level of correlation between these situational factors and the political decisions taken towards refugees, the authorities were, from this point, determined to reduce their number 'by all possible means' (Stel, 2020: 72). To that end, they exerted strong pressure on both refugees and donor countries for Syrians to return. Some political parties – such as the Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, and General Security (GSO) – organised some such returns (Mhaissen & Hodges 2019), and in 2019, the GSO implemented a decree leading to the deportation of Syrians having crossed the border with Lebanon 'illegally', after April of that year.

I.   <u>Towards defining the object of research</u>

A) A country 'under an aid regime'[14]

Lebanon has received a certain amount of attention from the international community, from the Paris conferences (held in 2001, 2002 and 2007) and the 2018 economic conference for the development of Lebanon through reforms and with businesses (CEDRE) which offered financial aid conditional on structural reforms, to the 2016 London conference and the now annual (since 2017) Brussels conference, which offered donations for refugee reception. These aid cycles are part of Europe's global strategy towards its Mediterranean neighbour – itself informed by three priorities, namely: the promotion of neoliberal policies, the eradication of Islamist movements, and migration control. This strategy also resorts to the (fallacious) argument of the push for 'democratic processes' in those recipient countries. This research tends to question and deconstruct the foundations of such support; I show that the hegemonic discourse surrounding these interventions turns out to be a powerful depoliticising machine.

---

[14] Original quote: 'sous régime d'aide' (Lavigne Delville 2016, cited in Fresia & Lavigne Delville 2018 : 11).

For the international community, Lebanon is a one-of-a-kind field of operation: a small country (less than 10,500 km²), which hosts the highest number of refugees per capita and is seen as a buffer zone between its conflict-ridden neighbours; a state that is perceived as structurally weak yet marked by financial capitalism and a neo-patrimonial logic of profiteering. Its socio-economic profile is unique: up until 2019 it remained a middle-income country, with a high level of infrastructure, and well-developed education, university and medical sectors. However, the staggering impact of the politico-economic crisis that began in late 2019 has forced 75% of its population below the poverty line.

Despite its multiple crises, the 'Lebanese exception' makes the 'land of Cedar' an enclave of relative freedom, a symbol of stability and neutrality in a region troubled by conflicts, earning it a reputation as a 'Switzerland of the Middle-East'; a country praised for its generosity towards 'wave after wave' of refugees, and for its 'resilience'. A fragile democracy, still standing tall despite the high winds of authoritarianism and ideological extremism that are sweeping through the Middle East, worthy of 'protection' by the international community. Lebanon occupies a unique place in the Western imaginary, for its image as a bridge between Orient and Occident and its rich cultural life – all of which makes it an attractive destination for international professionals of the development and humanitarian sectors.

Fragmentation is the key word used in both the dominant scholarly literature and the media to describe Lebanon. Fragmentation of the political landscape, governed by a confessional system of power-sharing, institutionalised by the national pacts of 1926 and 1943 and reiterated by the Taëf agreement of 1989. A society fragmented between eighteen communities (whose institutions occupy a key place in the everyday life of citizens) and between the Lebanese, the Syrians and the Palestinians. A prevalence of vested interests (and a private sector that dominates 70% of the educational and health sector) over a structurally absent state, which hinders the emergence of a social contract at the national level. A regime prey to foreign interference, a battlefield by proxy between its protecting powers (such as Iran, the United States and Saudi Arabia). These narratives frame Lebanon as a country torn between sectarian communities and special interests; one in which the establishment of a consensus (a pre-condition for effective governance), turns out to be an impossibility. The constant suspicion of being partisan or politicised is woven into every aspect of public life and extends into the associative sector – even as most of the many national organisations that have emerged following the Civil War claim to be apolitical.

According to these dominant narratives, this multidimensional fragmentation condemns the country to a built-in incapacity, making it part of the lineage of a necessary failure of governance. Recent works by Lebanese academics have shown that, in the mainstream scholarly literature, the Lebanese state is characterised as 'weak, broken down, irrelevant, or absent' (Mouawad & Baumann 2017: 66-67), with 'both a Weberian approach considering the state's internal position vis-à-vis other societal actors, and a Westphalian one, which considers it weak in relation to external actors'. Four main tropes underlie this so-called 'weakness': Lebanese society's segmentation into sociocultural units; the fact that the state cannot claim the monopoly of legitimate violence; regional interferences; and the *laissez-faire* economy. In the view, this state would be incapable of spurring structural reforms, as well as vulnerable to irremediable political instability. Lebanon has indeed experienced an extensive and periodic power vacuum – as testified to by the absence of a President (owing to a lack of political agreement) between 2014 and 2016, and of a Prime Minister between 2019 and 2021, after the October revolution had led to Saad Hariri's resignation.

However, this image of Lebanon as a country plagued by sectarian divisions and chronic incapacity suffers the effects of an essentialising lens, which deciphers local political processes on the basis of allegedly immutable categories of identity. For the international community, such a lens induces a Manichean interpretation of crisis, which effectively reduces Lebanese affairs to the status of a confrontation between pro-western, pro-democratisation sectarian communities, and those communities in which 'Islamism' is the driving force, allied to Damascus and Teheran; or a technical one, which reduces them to structural and technical deficiencies.

Post-culturalist studies have been deconstructing the postulates on which these essentialising readings are based ever since the 1990s, and these academic accounts aim to show that:

> 'Far from being immutable and ahistorical essences, sectarian identities, like other vertical cleavages, are historical constructions; their intensity and centrality to modes of political mobilisation is based on specific political, ideological, and geopolitical contexts' (Salloukh et al. 2015: 1).

Far from being the product of a supposedly 'essential' Lebanese identity, the hegemony of sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilisation is the result of deliberate strategies implemented by sectarian and political elites seeking to impede the emergence of any semblance of rule of law. These readings, entrenched in a political economy perspective, emphasise that class structures are underpinned by strategies of sectarian division (Traboulsi 2012; Salloukh et al. 2015). Following the Civil War, an alliance between sectarian/political elites and the commercial/financial oligarchy has, in a profit-oriented logic, controlled state institutions and resources and implemented socio-economic policies that serve their own material interests; this has allowed them to both lubricate sophisticated clientelist networks and strive for the [reproduction] of sectarian identities and modes of political mobilisation' (*ibid*., 2015: 2). As Salloukh (*ibid*.) neatly puts it:

> 'This mongrel combination of an institutionally weak but centralised state, one in which sectarian actors often align with external patrons to bolster their power against local opponents, sustains a stubborn institutional and clientelist complex, enables the sectarian/political elite to reproduce sectarian identities and institutional dynamics, and exposes the country to external manipulations, geopolitical contests and perpetual crisis' (*ibid*.: 2-3).

Many scholars have thus called for recourse to new critical theories of the state, and to social theoretical approaches, so that Lebanon can be analysed from beyond these taken-for-granted and dominant assumptions. Social scientists have questioned the weakness paradigm (Hermez 2015; Ghamroun 2014) showing that 'state weakness does not explain how politics works' (Mouawad & Baumann 2017: 70). Following these works, and in light of current events, a new series of terms with which to describe the Lebanese state and grasp its modalities of action has been popularised – in particular the notion of 'neo-patrimonial' (Dagher 2022; Maucourant & Farah 2021; Mouawad & Baumann 2017), i.e a state governed as a private company, in which power is personalised, based on clientelist networks, and state resources are conceived of as a source of enrichment. Indeed, 'Lebanon fits the mold of the neo-patrimonial developing state in which the rational legal separation of public and private realms is a mere façade hiding the continuation of premodern patrimonial authority' (Mouawad & Baumann, 2017: 68). Further, the democratic character of the Lebanese state, hitherto validated by the international community (allowing the government to stay in the good books of Western donors) is no longer taken for granted: the 'land of Cedar' is now classified by experts as being among the

'authoritarian countries'.[15] Such readings prompt a calling into question of the role of international aid institutions, which project a certain image of Lebanon while validating (or even protecting) its neo-patrimonial system and dominant elites. Another paradigm is that of the 'hybrid' state; it reveals how state and non-state actors mutually constitute and feed on one another in order to operate, and how hybrid actors engage in state-like practices of power, such as security or foreign policy (Stel 2020; Fregonese 2012; Hazbun 2016; Hourani 2013).

In my research, I am adopting an attitude of deconstruction regarding this culturalist and essentialist narrative, by taking the representation of a country 'hopelessly' incapable of governing itself as an object of investigation, rather than as a tool with which to analyse its social reality. This image of Lebanon is not neutral; I am interested in how it determines the *modus operandi* of foreign interventions and provides crucial arguments for their legitimisation. Indeed, the idea of international aid freed from the partisan interests that divide the national arena is gaining ground throughout the global humanitarian ecosystem. The affirmation of a 'depoliticised' international realm finds a symbolic (and powerfully resounding) echo in the 'land of Cedar', a country conceived of by the international community as a 'projectorat' (Carmona 2008, cited in Fresia & Lavigne Delville 2018: 11) because of its weakness and incapacities (which are essentialised even when they result from political choices). As a matter of fact, aid policies represent morally loaded 'systems of meanings' (Gardner & Lewis 2015: 113; cited in Fresia & Delville 2018: 33) that downgrade the social and political realities of some areas of the world by referring to them in terms of depoliticised and technical 'shortcomings' or 'deficiencies' that could be resolved through to the 'good practices' of these organisations.

B) Defining the object of research

This PhD research focuses on the role of international actors in the governance of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. I am interested in the practices, processes, rationalities and discourses that underpin their interventions. I investigate the power relations deployed within this aid-based regime of governance (Lavigne Delville 2016); that is, the relationships between international and national actors, whether they are drawn from Lebanese authorities or civil society. Thus, I

---

[15] Lebanon was classified as an 'authoritarian regime' for first time in the 2022 *Economist*'s annual Democracy Index, which changed its classification from a 'hybrid regime' to an 'authoritarian regime'.

explore the 'political fabric' of refugee governance by showing that it is rooted in specific configurations of complex assemblages of actors, discourses, controversies, political and institutional logics and socio-technical mechanisms. My work thus forms part of a tradition of reconstructing aid discourses, their assumptions and implicit postulates, the segmentation of social reality that they operate, and the relations of domination that they convey (Escobar 1991; Rist 1996). After introducing the main concepts underpinning my reflection and the relevant literature, I will detail my problematisation process.

II. <u>Theoretical framework</u>

A) Externalisation and Critical Border Studies

This thesis draws on the literature on the externalisation of European borders and migratory policies, and the field of Critical Border Studies (which emerged during the 2000s). Externalisation refers to a set of policies aimed at containing migratory flows prior to their arrival on European territory, with a transfer of responsibility to third countries and extraterritorial measures of 'remote control' (Zolberg 2006) and 'police at distance' (Bigo 2002; Guild & Bigo 2010).[16] These include visa policies, the conclusion of bilateral readmission agreements, joint maritime patrolling operations, the drafting of laws criminalising irregular migrations, the establishment of immigration liaison officers, retention centres and disembarkation platforms in sending countries, and so on. Measures that facilitated the externalisation of control mechanisms in North and sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe (Lavenex 2002; Anderson & Bolt 2011) and Turkey (Fine 2016), which were usually conditional on financial support or agreements facilitating visa issuance for these countries, have allowed the European Union to transform into a veritable 'fortress' with closed external borders (Lacroix 2016).

The field of Critical Border Studies conceives of borders as transnational, heterogeneous assemblages of actors, tactics, practices, technologies and knowledges. They reveal a shift from

---

[16] The subordination of refugee issues to EU policies on migration flow control was launched at the Tampere summit in 1999, which concluded with the 2008 signature of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum.

the study of borders to the study of 'bordering processes'; where borders are no longer considered as fixed entities but rather as fluid and dynamic social constructs resulting from power struggles. Bordering processes expand beyond strict territorial borders, and include phenomena as wide and delocalised as refugee and migrant selection processes, resettlement processes to third countries, and sanctions against private transportation companies (when transporting migrants is made illegal).

Recent studies have revealed the diversification of externalisation policies, with information and awareness campaigns (Pécoud 2010), carried by the cultural industry (Rodriguez 2019), including both theatre (Giusa & Dini 2020) and music (Van Dessel 2021). These campaigns aim to deter migrants from undertaking dangerous departures by sea. The diversification of the actors mobilised in externalisation processes also includes grassroots organisations from civil society as well as transportation company employees. Humanitarian actors such as the UNHCR, the IOM and INGOs also play a role in border externalisation (Cuttitta 2020; Scalettaris 2013; Fine 2016; Van Dessel 2019). They also play a role in deterrence campaigns, as well as surveillance and selection practices (Scalettaris 2013). These actors tend to be both co-opted by states and co-opting local NGOs.

In the Near East, externalisation policies have resulted in the use of development aid to reinforce reception and protection capacities, and develop the 'resilience' of both refugees and host communities (Fakhoury & Stel 2022; Turner & Lenner 2021). Since 2015, the EU has formalised a change of paradigm (Fakhoury 2020: 7-8), with a focus on the use of livelihood and employment to incentivise refugees to remain in transit countries by improving their living conditions there; it was in this context that the EU-Turkey migratory deal[17] and the Compacts with Jordan and Lebanon were concluded in 2016, with mixed results (Fakhoury 2021; Fakhoury & Stel 2022; Turner 2021a).

This research makes an original contribution because of the specificities of the Lebanese case, as one of border policy externalisation in the (relatively unexplored) Eastern Mediterranean. Lebanon does not border Europe, and nor is it accessible by any direct overland route, though it is included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Crucially, contrary to most of the

---

[17] The 2016 EU-Turkey deal provides a paradigmatic example: the Turkish government committed to stopping refugee influx towards Europe in exchange for six billion euros.

abovementioned examples, migrant flows from Lebanon do not represent an immediate 'threat' to Europe, and the maritime border with Cyprus was not (at least until 2020) a focus of major attention for the international community. Funds for security cooperation were mainly allocated to reinforcement of the land border with Syria, the provision of infrastructure, control equipment, and training for the Lebanese army. This enabled the army to undertake border police missions, as well as improve security at Beirut airport and the Port of Tripoli. The ICMPD played a crucial role in the implementation of these projects – as one of the leading institutions in the field of migration policy, with the clear aim of pushing for the Europeanisation of migration policies and migration management (Georgi 2011). In Lebanon, it has operated through the EU-funded International Border Management (IBM) project (under way since 2012), which aimed to address significant gaps in the Lebanese security system.

From a neo-Marxist perspective, Critical Border Studies have highlighted the power dynamics embedded in externalisation to the extent that 'in a world characterised by widely varying conditions, international borders serve to maintain global inequality' (Zolberg 1989: 406). However, scholarly literature has emphasised that the existence (or threat) of migratory flows increases the negotiating power of Southern countries (for instance, Paoletti 2011; Cassarino 2005); thus, Tsourapas (2019: 468) has shown how in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, authorities have pursued 'refugee rent-seeking behaviour' as a way of requesting additional aid from the donor community. Indeed, during the April 2017 Brussels I conference (on 'Supporting the Future of Syria in its Region'), former Prime Minister Saad Hariri used the threat of a migratory crisis at the door to the EU, declaring that 'we could let refugees move towards Europe' in a bid to convince his interlocutors of the necessity of leveraging their financial support.

B) Depoliticisation and repoliticisation

As a concept, politics is both contested and evolving. Its 'Schmittian' meaning refers to the resolution of conflicts and the assertion of diverging standpoints. This somewhat reductive definition has nonetheless infused our contemporary vision of politics, which is often perceived pejoratively as no more than a confrontation between partisan interests. Without adopting the opposite view, according to which 'everything is political' (which would denude it of meaning) I am adopting the broader definition put forward by Louis & Maestrens (2021: 4), who 'consider as part of politics the activities which eventually have an impact on the daily lives of a broader

collectivity because they involve considerations on the legitimacy of detaining power, exercising authority and delivering adequate policies'. Politics does encompass spheres and actors associated with governmental functions and electoral stakes; yet it also includes activities *a priori* deemed mundane, ordinary or informal, as well as aspects of our social interactions not explicitly presented as political. The frontiers of politics are thus never completely bounded, once and for all: what is political (or not) depends on the socio-historical context in which the issue is being stated (or debated). In short, while politics is not necessarily 'everywhere', everything can become political under certain circumstances and from certain perspectives. 'Politicisation' is thus a 'classification' activity that consists of defining the boundaries of politics.

The 'negative stance towards politics' (Louis & Maertens 2021: 3) expressed by international development professionals has been a subject under investigation since the 1990s. Indeed, 'while IOs deal with core political issues, politics is mainly perceived as an obstacle to the achievement of the ideas conveyed by these organisations' (*ibid*.: 3). Hence the paradox: 'How can they escape politics while being deeply embedded in it?'. The hypothesis proposed by some of the literature (Louis & Maertens 2021; Pécoud 2015; Cuttitta 2018) is that, in order to present their actions as being devoid of political interests, these organisations resort to 'depoliticisation'. This refers to the tendency of political actors to obscure the political character of political facts and present policymaking as a neutral, necessary and incontestable process in which the option of choosing between different political (and not simply technical) alternatives is (like disagreement and contestation) either limited or denied (Louis & Maertens 2021; Fawcett et al. 2017). Depoliticisation includes 'the set of processes (including varied tactics, strategies and tools) that remove or displace potential for choice, collective agency, and deliberation around a particular political issue' (Hay 2007, cited in Fawcett et al. 2017: 5). To this end, it 'invokes a naturalising totalisation of social meanings and identities, presenting them as something given and taken for granted, and which, therefore, can be neither questioned nor transformed through action' (*ibid*.: 32). Wood & Flinders (2014) distinguish between three types of depoliticisation: governmental depoliticisation (the withdrawal of politicians from direct control of a vast range of functions and the rise of technocratic forms of governance); societal depoliticisation (by which the social deliberation surrounding a political issue gradually erodes so far that choices are no longer debated); and discursive depoliticisation (when only a single discourse, relying on a single interpretation of the problem, is in circulation). Petiteville (2017 a & b) has put forward an alternative classification: he distinguishes between 'normative'

depoliticisation (the assertion of consensual objectives that are difficult to contest); discursive depoliticisation (which involves evading dilemmas and divergences of interest); and depoliticisation through expertise (which favours a technical approach while ignoring political issues).

Initially confined to neoliberal governance and the Europeanisation of public policy, this paradigm was introduced to Development Studies through Ferguson's pioneering work, *the Anti-Politics Machine* (1994). Using the example of a World Bank-sponsored project that aimed to reduce poverty in Lesotho, this anthropologist has shown how 'anti-politics' (those conceived as technical solutions to technical problems, driven by apolitical aims) have ultimately served the expansion of state control. Within the work of IOs, Louis & Maertens (2021) have identified the 'logics' of depoliticisation – such as following a functional-pragmatic path (geared towards problem-solving or stigmatising politics), monopolising legitimacy, or avoiding responsibility. These logics trigger depoliticisation 'practices': the assertion of expertise, the production of neutrality, or manipulation of the agenda in order to gain time.

A range of studies have shown how migration governance has produced a particular knowledge about migrants and refugees, along with convictions about how they should be governed, and this has led to *de facto* depoliticisation of external governmental interventions (Pécoud 2015). Geiger & Pécoud (2013) have shown that the depoliticisation of international migration narratives rests on the enunciation of consensual (and indisputable) objectives, such as the fight against human trafficking. Therefore, measures taken against this 'universal enemy' do not trigger opposition, even though they underlie a vast (and ideologically loaded) agenda (Walters 2015). One crucial strategy of this depoliticisation is the division of people on the move into categories having corresponding policy prescriptions, with its touchstone being the dichotomy between 'refugee' and 'migrant' (Akoka 2020). In the Lebanese case, these categorisation practices have led to differing statuses being accorded to Syrians and Palestinians, as well as to Palestinians from Lebanon and Palestinians from Syria.

In the same vein, studies have presented the UNHCR as an agency that has 'increasingly affirmed its authority by depoliticising, moralising, and making technical issues that are inherently political' (Fresia 2012: 52; as well as Scalettaris 2013). The UNHCR's mandate is defined in the 1951 Convention as neutral and apolitical, so that it cannot interfere in the internal affairs of the states in which it intervenes. According to Fine (2016: 81), both the UNHCR and

the IOM 'assert epistemic authority through their positioning as depoliticised actors who provide assistance to states in the form of policy recommendations, the dissemination of best practices, capacity-building and evidence-based policy development'. Thus, the production of knowledge about refugees represents a fully-fledged arena of power, allowing the UNHCR to capitalise on its 'expert' status to provide policy recommendations. This depoliticisation has been facilitated by the evolution of the UNHCR's role worldwide, as the agency has been shifting its focus from legal protection and the search for durable solutions (its original mandate), two activities that touch upon political dynamics, to relief and operational assistance, which are more prone to depoliticisation (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012). These depoliticisation activities may allow the UNHCR to increase its scope for action, but its apolitical non-intervention mandate has the opposite effect – limiting its ability to make decisions independently from the states in which it operates (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012).

Furthermore, both the claimed universality of the UNHCR mandate and the 'naturalness' of refugee status are historically contingent political constructs, and as such, are continuously produced, renegotiated and contested. It makes sense, then, to deconstruct the epistemological foundations on which they rely. Malkki (1995) has shown that the 'refugee problem' is understood exclusively within the national order, i.e. as a system of representation embedded in the nation-state, which institutionalises and 'naturalises' the 'isomorphism between polities of citizens and the territories of their state of citizenship' (Scalettaris 2013: 14 & 2018). In the same vein, 'methodological nationalism' refers to the tendency of policymakers and scholars to assume that the nation-state is the natural social and political form of the modern world (Wimmer & Schiller 2002). Unravelling the depoliticisation processes that are linked to refugee governance entails taking concepts such as the state, or sovereignty, as objects of analysis rather than as conceptual frameworks, and tracing the genealogy of these modes of thinking, which deeply permeate both our worldview, and our everyday explanations of political and social realities. Scalettaris (2013) reflexively describes the difficulties she encountered to breaking free of the mode of thinking ingrained in her while working for the UNHCR, and adopts a critical stance towards the UN agency's institutional 'unthinking'.[18] She uses the term 'international episteme' to designate this vision of the mode according to which the state constitutes the universal (and sole) mode of political organisation and the ultimate competent authority. In particular, the UNHCR rationality is based on a 'sedentary bias'

---

[18] My own translation of 'impensés'.

(Bakewell 2002), which conceives of mobility either as an abnormality, or as the symptom of a problem. In fact, the agency has always favoured a sedentary lifestyle for refugees, institutionalising the link between refugees and their state of origin. This represents an important limitation of its action, because refugees find protection precisely in mobility and the mobilisation of transnational resources and networks.

Depoliticisation does not mean that the work of IOs (which is determined, to differing degrees, by the strategic use made of them by donor states) has become any less political, but rather that it has been transferred to a less obviously politicised arena of governance (Fawcett et al. 2017: 17). Petiteville theorised the 'resilience of politics': 'international organisations are not able to avoid the resilient forms of politicisation linked to the issues they deal with' (Petiteville 2017a: 9). Thus, the UNHCR has been studied as an instrument used by donor states to meet their own interests (Fresia 2013), in particular by integrating the control logic of migratory flows (Betts et al. 2012: 68). Henceforth, 'repoliticisation' highlights these political interests; it refers to the process through which 'contingency, deliberation and choice are revealed in processes of decision-making' (Fawcett et al. 2017: 289). Repoliticisation entails 'demonstrating a form of critical awareness of the political character of policy decisions made by state authorities in a manner that disrupts the continuation of power politics' (Torfing 1999 *cited in* Fawcett et al. 2017: 32). It reasserts the conflictual character of politics, and promotes 'the existence of antagonism, conflict, difference and choice' as well as 'the undecidable, contingent, and contestable character of the meaning and identities that make up our social, economic, and political lifeworlds' (*ibid.*: 32). Repoliticisation thus differs from politicisation, which refers to the activation of a political element that has not been previously negated.

By highlighting the fluidity of their relationship, Petiteville (2017a) puts forward a dialectical interpretation of the interaction between (re)politicisation and depoliticisation. Similarly, Cuttitta (2018: 634) has shown how NGOs conducting search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean 'fluctuate between depoliticisation and repoliticisation', framing their humanitarian operations in terms of political commitment and showing different degrees of 'political positioning' with regard to current migration and border policies, moving between silence and open, vocal criticism.

In the literature, two paradigms are highlighted as vehicles for depoliticisation of the refugee and migrant regime: humanitarianism and securitisation.

C) Humanitarianism

Humanitarianism refers to the increasingly organised and internationalised attempts to protect the lives, reduce the suffering and enhance the welfare of those civilian populations that find themselves victims of crises and conflicts. It represents 'an ideology, a movement and a profession' which together constitute 'a real political economy' (Donini 2010: S220) that plays a crucial role in the collective consciousness of our time. Fassin (2011: 463) documented the process through which, in recent decades, 'contemporary moral economies have been constituted around a new relationship to suffering, that has made it a central element of our public life' and even 'in the political arena […] an effective justification for action'.

Such 'humanitarian government' corresponds to the 'deployment of moral sentiments in contemporary politics' (*ibid.*: 1) and has led to a paradigm shift in refugee policies: previously perceived through the prism of political persecution, refugees are now seen through that of physical and mental suffering. Between *zoé* (or the 'biological' or 'bare' life), and *bio* (life characterised by political and social communities), identified by Agamben (1998), it is the former that has imposed itself as more legitimate than the latter. Liisa Malkki (1995) has ethnographically validated this paradigm shift, showing how humanitarian practices protect a 'minimal' (or 'bare') humanity, an object of charity rather than a subject of law, and one deprived of its political and social dimensions. Concretely, this translates into an emphasis on basic and medical needs (over political persecution) during the refugee status determination process. Thus, 'political subjectivation has moved from a demand for justice to the exposure of pain' (Fassin 2011: 219). This logic is applied differently in different geographical locations: in Northern countries, it is the 'asylum seeker' who is seen as an individual figure whose body and personal stories are scrutinised, and in southern countries, populations are processed in massive numbers, and indiscriminately, and their allegorical figure is that of the 'refugee' living in a camp.

Humanitarianism leads to biopolitical practices of control by sovereign authority, as shown by Fassin (2011) and Malkki (1995) through Agamben's work (1998) on how humanitarian organisations understand human life as 'bare life'. However, Ticktin's work (2006), conducted

in France, adds nuance to this idea by showing that in reality, the politics of compassion combine 'bare' and 'political' life in new ways, by producing a limited humanity which, by reifying racial and gender hierarchies, leads to discriminatory practices.

This shift from a political to a compassionate and technical rhetoric specific to humanitarian action is depoliticising, as the ethical and moral imperative of alleviating suffering is difficult to argue with. Some of the literature has however sought to demonstrate a form of epistemological distancing, by emphasising the political functions of humanitarianism and its underlying ideology. Humanitarianism thus represents a way of understanding the world even as it hides not only certain aspects of reality but also a form of power – the power to decide which crises deserve attention and which victim categories should be prioritised.

One criticism addressed to the humanitarian sector is the fact that it represents a neocapitalist and transnational system of governance employing hundreds of thousands of individuals driven by a willingness to defend their place within this 'global meritocracy of suffering' (Cooley & Roon 2002). Thus, Naomi Klein regrets 'the rise of a predatory form of disaster capitalism that uses the desperation and fear created by catastrophe to engage in radical social and economic engineering'.[19] Elizabeth Picard even comes to the conclusion that 'for Lebanon, humanitarian assistance for refugees represents an industry more profitable for those who organise it than for those for whom it is intended' (2016: 324).

Humanitarian organisations also face criticism for offering both Western states and the United Nations an excuse for the 'wait-and-see' attitude that seems them content to send emergency aid to crisis countries, while drawing attention away from structural problems. This emotionally-driven emphasis essentialises people as victims, far removed from the social reality in which they live: 'by evading this complex reality, which makes moral judgements less certain and solutions less unambiguous, compassion may, paradoxically, prove to be a sentiment that spares those feeling it from having to take more demanding action' (Fassin 2011: 180).

Walker & Maxwell (2008: 21) have shown that the two 'C's informing humanitarian action ('compassion' and 'change'), have been joined by a third – *containment* – which takes the form

[19]   Source: Naomi   Klein,   14   April   2015,   'the   rise   of   disaster capitalism', https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/rise-disaster-capitalism/.

of aid aimed at containing crisis and preventing northward migratory flows. The UNHCR is at the heart of this criticism: the integration of migratory flows to its activities has largely compromised its protection mandate (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012). The humanitarian argument has also been used to justify surveillance operations at sea (see, for instance, Cuttitta 2018).

Above all, humanitarianism is a dominant discourse underpinned by the increasingly oligopolistic, institutionalised and standardised nature of the industry in which it operates. Despite its proclaimed universalism, the term is deeply enshrined within a Western ethos and a 'civilising' mission inspired by the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Western humanitarianism is the dominant, multi-billion dollar, visible face of the humanitarian field; and it dictates the language, conceptualisation and rules of the game, excluding activities that either fail to meet its standards or are rooted in other traditions – such as remittances, Zakat[20] and contributions from faith-based communities – all of which are excluded from official development assistance. The contemporary humanitarian landscape is thus dominated by a 'functional secularism' whose universal claims serve to discredit alternative narratives (Ager & Ager 2011): 'while in principle 'neutral' to religion, in practice this framing serves to marginalise religious language, practice and experience in both the global and local conceptualisation of humanitarian action' (456). These religious approaches are undeniably of empirical significance: 'whilst at the margins of international humanitarianism and academic accounts of its operation, [they] are at the core of the experience of the vast majority of communities facing crisis and, perhaps as crucially, of the majority of national humanitarian agency staff' (*ibid*.: 465).

D)   Securitisation

'Securitisation' refers to 'the process leading to the transformation of certain entities into a threat' (Balzacq 2008); it reveals that security threats corresponds to discursive and symbolic processes, rather than objective entities. Critical Security Studies have revealed a post-Cold War paradigm shift: 'securitisation' is no longer confined to traditional military threats and now

---

[20] Zakat or almsgiving is one of the five pillars of Islam and obligatory and continuous activity for all believers as the religious obligation for Muslims to give annually 2,5% of one's wealth every year should go to charity.

includes new societal threats – such as the environment, development and migration (Buzan 1993). The Copenhagen and the Paris Schools have shown how the EU has 'constructed' the theme of 'immigration invasion' as a central fear that both structures contemporary societies and justifies security responses (Bigo 1998; Guild & Bigo 2010; Huysmans 2000); a fear articulated around the themes of criminality, concern for the balance of the labour market or the spectre of Islamic terrorism. Thus:

> 'When a political discourse sees only enmity, uses (for security purposes) the most diverse statistical tools to materialise the adversary, and invokes (with varying degrees of relevance) relations between these large structures, their long processes and the reasons for the necessary 'securitisation' of immigration, it is defining a policy of control (over flows), controlled integration, and surveillance (of mentalities and attitudes). This means that, moved by a 'rhetoric of jeopardy' it has become a discourse of 'securitisation' that advocates exceptional solutions' (Bigo 1998: 4).

The Copenhagen School (Buzan, Waever & Wilde 1998) studies societal securitisation as a discursive process that 'involves appealing to and protecting an imagined, homogeneous community from the outsider' (Buzan 1993: 5). Thus, it emphasises the key role played by identity-related anxieties in contemporary societies, focusing on society's ability to 'persist in its essential character […] if it is societies that are the central focus of this new security problematic, then it is issues of identity and migration that drive the underlying perceptions of threats and vulnerabilities' (*ibid*.: 5). It relies on Austin's speech act theory (1962), according to which labelling a problem as an existential threat can legitimise certain political practices. Discursive securitisation is primarily the work of elites, and their authority and structural position of power are such that the audience receives both their discourse and their worldview as valid.

Within the Paris School, scholars approach securitisation as a sociological process, taking note of the emergence of a transnational field of professionals and exploring the routines, day-to-day practices, interactions and technologies deployed by bureaucracies in this 'fear management' (Bigo 1998; Balzacq 2005; Huysmans 2000), which entails predicting and controlling dangers before they manifest. This approach emphasises the crucial role played by the deployment of expertise in securitisation processes: i.e. who defines what is dangerous, according to what criteria, through what processes, and how the objects of security knowledge

are produced, disseminated and assimilated. This securitisation results from structural power positions and succeeds only on condition that it is imposed as the 'legitimate truth' after validation by this category of professionals, by being communicated and supported by the practical know-how of various public and private security agencies: 'the security process is thus the result of a field effect […] in which everyone's knowledge and technological resources produce a hierarchy of threats' (Bigo 1998: 7). It acts as a 'conversion operator by which the struggle of political discourses (within the political field, which may add or subtract value) is validated as a truth process by threat management professionals' (*ibid.*: 7).

What we are seeing is greater convergence between humanitarianism and securitisation (or compassion and repression) in refugee policies. According to Agier (2011), the humanitarian apparatus can be defined, on a world scale, as the left hand of the Empire: he identifies 'the hand that cares and the hand that strikes'. A vicious circle thus emerges, in which 'securitisation' allows migration to be considered as an emergency. This urgent character legitimises the use of the right hand to strike, while the 'humanitarisation' of the issue requires use of the left hand to care (or cure).

Recent research has shown the close correlation between the level of 'fear' or concerns generated by migrant arrivals in European countries, and the increased bargaining power of sending countries – even though this fear lacks any empirical grounding. In fact, though Syrian movements from Lebanon to Europe are almost non-existent, the narrative of a potential 'invasion' dominates political and media discourse, and European support to Lebanon includes a strong security component with anti-terrorist programmes. In line with this logic, an increased securitisation of refugees represents valuable leverage for countries such as Lebanon or Jordan, so as to impose their own priorities on foreign donors (Tsourapas 2019; Facon 2020).

III. __Problematisation__

My research hypothesis is that depoliticisation is a key modality of foreign interventions concerning Syrian refugees in Lebanon; it structures their discursive space and leads to legitimisation of their existence. I approach depoliticisation as a *modus operandi,* or as a tactic, conscious or unconscious, to achieve an end, in this case the legitimisation of a political agenda of containment. I explore its practices and logics, routines and habits, and its effects and consequences. Depoliticisation participates in the production of a hegemonic discourse that naturalises both the border and humanitarian regime in which Syrian refugees are embedded: a regime deeply ingrained in a 'naturalised' national order, where a return to the country of origin is the only conceivable horizon, in the eyes of both the international community and the Lebanese authorities. This narrative, presented as neutral and coherent, puts on hold any political perspective regarding Syria or the conditions of reception in Lebanon. It also illustrates the 'sedentary bias' that informs the refugee regime's thinking (Bakewell 2002) – a powerfully depoliticising bias that establishes the link between the individual and their country of origin as an authoritative argument, precluding any debate around this national order, while obliterating the political circumstances of the Syrian conflict.

I draw upon the notion of 'governmentality', which has become prominent in research on migration governance – governance being here be defined as a process of decision-making involving a variety of actors regarding a public issue, leading to the production of social norms or policies. Governmentality explores the interwoven forms and mechanisms of power and influence in the management of migration flows (Geiger & Pecoud 2013). Multi-level governance refers to the 'dispersal of state authority and the rise of various interactive regulatory sites' (Bache & Flinders 2004; cited in Fakhoury 2018: 2). In the field of migration, it explores the entwining and blurring of global, regional, and national migration regimes and the multitude of strategies that actors draw upon to manage migration' (Fakhoury: *ibid*.). Governmentality studies have emphasised the relevance of this concept to understand the international refugee regime, inspired by Michel Foucault's later writings on 'governmentality', which he describes as the 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power' (Foucault 1980, cited in Lippert 1999: 295). Governmentality studies

assume specific knowledges are necessary for particular governmental domains to emerge and function and that associated practices are dependent upon knowing their objects.

The concept of 'transnational governmentality' sheds light on the role of international institutions in establishing norms to regulate global problems, without having recourse to binding mechanisms (Fresia & Lavigne Delville 2018). Transnational governmentality contributes to rendering the issues it tackles devoid of political substance, by treating them from a 'technical' angle, under the guise of 'neutrality'. In the first instance, the depoliticisation of international interventions involves mobilisation of the humanitarianism and securitisation paradigms, both of which are firmly rooted in a naturalisation of the sovereign state and the link between refugees and their state of origin, as well as by a 'centralist illusion of power' (Bigo 1998: 7). The literature has amply demonstrated that the migration control regime is deeply marked by the combination of two logics of intervention and two types of narratives that seem at first glance opposed but are in reality complementary: that of humanitarianism (which refers to the necessity of saving human lives) and that of securitisation (which refers to the necessity of protecting borders from the suspected threat of irregular migrations). In line with Critical Border Studies, I approach the selection and resettlement practices to which Syrian refugees are subjected as crucial vectors of securitisation. Depoliticisation logics also pervade the field of border cooperation, where donors have taken into consideration neither the hybrid and dynamic character of the Lebanese security assemblage nor the historic fluidity of border spaces between Syria and Lebanon; thus, the IBM project has failed to gain traction at the political level (Tholens 2017). In this regard, the role of the 'Border Control Committee' gathering both international and Lebanese security actors has been crucial in the 'governmentalisation' of migration management by fostering the same definition of problems and their solutions.[21] Further, donors have failed to take into consideration either the hybrid and dynamic character of the Lebanese security assemblage or the historic fluidity of border spaces between Syria and Lebanon; thus, the IBM project has failed to gain traction at the political level (Tholens 2017).

I would add that (equally fundamental) depoliticisation mechanisms are targeting the Lebanese state itself. These promote an essentialised and reified vision of Lebanon, its shortcomings and lack of capacity, and in particular set in motion the dual paradigms of crisis and resilience.

---

[21] Thus, the logic of cooperation in border management is different from when it comes to refugee assistance, where the state and its apparatus are bypassed by foreign funds.

These have structured a *continuum* of significations and political labelling around ideas of state absence and fragmentation, of a constantly-crisis-stricken state legitimising massive foreign interventions, and of the country's ability to rebound from these crises. All these narratives drive the logic of international action towards a country constructed as a 'land of refuge', while suspending any political perspective.

These paradigms have taken shape through the convergence of particular forms of institutional knowledge. They act on the one hand as 'power-knowledge' (Foucault 1972), constructing and disseminating framings of social reality by marking the boundaries of what is thinkable and legitimate and what is not. They function, on the other hand, as disciplinary technologies structuring refugee policies, conferring coherence upon the fragmentation of practices on the ground, and maintaining a complex network of relations necessary to this governance.

Investigating depoliticisation entails 'denaturalising' both the frame of action and the epistemological tenets of the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995) in which the refugee regime is embedded, as well as its statist and sedentary vision of identities, linked to forms of governmentality specific to the Westphalian system. These decentring and deconstruction processes should also apply to those concepts usually mobilised in describing Lebanon: resilience, crisis, incapacity, durability of confessional identities and consequent divisions, etc. This work aims to explore the propagation of the disciplinary technology of depoliticisation across Lebanon's refugee governance 'ecosystem' and its structuring effects. I thus investigate whether national authorities are imposing, co-opting or re-appropriating 'systems of meanings' (Gardner & Lewis 2015: 113) such as humanitarianism or securitisation, as well as whether local NGOs play the role of passive receivers of these political technologies that they are required to adopt, or whether they participate in defining transnational governmentality. I will explore the effects of this international support on the Lebanese state and the continuity and durability of its neo-patrimonial and hybrid governance mode.

Gulf donor practices seem to resist the depoliticisation inherent to the coalition of UN organisations and Western states, especially when it comes to 'technocratic distancing'. At first glance, their governance practices seem 'politicised' to the extent that they display the religious, political or even personal origins of interventions, revealing their contingency – and therefore their political character. This crystallises a religious humanitarianism that is opposed to the universalist ethos of the secular humanitarianism of the UN system. Arab donors reject some

'depoliticising' categories defined by this system, starting with the institutionalisation of the division between refugees and migrant workers, as they have equated migration and refugee governance with the management of labour migration. However, as they have progressively integrated Western donors' forms of governmentality (in order to access the field and legitimise their interventions without fully integrating the UN structures), their mode of governance has become hybrid. We might well wonder, then, whether an analysis of their practices would allow them to bring out a new governance model capable of adding nuance to the institutional hegemony of Western donors and the UNHCR and challenging the theoretical assumption that international actors are obliged to perform depoliticisation whenever they are involved in humanitarian or refugee policies. This would indicate that politicised practices can indeed shape refugee governance just as depoliticised practices can, with a form of governance that places a display of its fragility and contingency at its core.

At this point, we need further reflection on the depoliticising power of this fragmentation. Indeed, the segmentation of this nebulous refugee regime's bureaucracy results in the dilution of policy developments and the obliteration of all forms of responsibility, while concealing power relations. While the existing literature stresses the pursuit of coherence through depoliticisation processes, this research also explores the depoliticising potential of maintaining incoherence, ambiguities, a lack of legibility, the idea that governance is necessarily complicated and leads to inevitable disagreements; premises that are depoliticising because they have the effect of closing down any debate.

Finally, I am apprehensive about potential 'repoliticisation' mechanisms in the UNHCR and donor actions, and whether there is a reactivation of the politico-ideological character of governance? Any criticism of the hegemonic agenda of refugee governance, and any counter-narrative involve a form of repoliticisation because they entail questioning norms established as universal. I am interested in signs (or 'symptoms') of repoliticisation – such as the existence of debates, the circulation of narratives and actions revealing political agency, choice, responsibility, political context and controversies, the phenomenon of polarisation and divides (for instance, when it comes to externalisation policies or reception conditions in Lebanon); the promotion of alternative frameworks of thought and policies, etc. Since the legitimacy of the international agenda rests on its ability to self-justify, any counter-narrative highlighting the failures and inconsistencies of this system represents a form of challenge to it (Cuttitta 2018), and could lead to the erosion of depoliticised narratives. In Lebanon, one crucial debate has

revolved around the widespread feeling that the international community should do more to share the burden of hosting refugees through resettlement.[22] In this context, the UNHCR has been made a 'scapegoat', representing the international community while invisibilising the responsibility of donor countries.

Reflecting upon the counter-hegemonic potential of these discourses entails assessing the scale of their 'circulation' (Weedon 1996: 107). This research aims, therefore, to understand the complex processes through which 'politics strikes back' (Louis & Maertens 2021: 186). Does repoliticisation go beyond the discursive sphere, giving rise to political practices and creating a space for negotiation, or does it modify relations of power and authority? I will consider this 'political work' (as the term is understood by Mérand 2022), that is, as practices aimed at carving out a space for political agency in an environment that is severely restricted by political rules, international norms and intergovernmental power structures.

My approach is based on a form of sociological constructivism: I study discursive interactions, speakers' positions of authority, and the rationales governing what is sayable and not sayable. I aim to show the structuring power of depoliticisation as well as its fragile and evolving character. My grasp of repoliticisation dynamics helps me avoid the pitfall of taking a reified view of the UNHCR (and other international actors) which would tend to perceive them as homogeneous entities with limited institutional contours. I understand their power in terms of a diffuse and unstable hegemony, because it is dependent on the continuous negotiation, mobilisation and enlistment of a number of actors. Thus, in response to the myth of power saturating the social, I focus on the reality of multiple and complex practices, and how this can dilute   the   effects   of   power.

This research work adopts a stance of 'radical critique' (Fresia & Lavigne Delville 2018: 345-346)[23] towards aid, touching on the epistemological foundations of its moral and ideological premises, as well as the power relationships reproduced by aid. In line with postcolonial and neo-dependentist criticism (Escobar 1995; Rist 1996), it seeks, then, to deconstruct the institutional logics that shape refugee governance, expert knowledge's assumptions, and the

---

[22] For instance, see: regional NGO Platform, 2018, Promise to Practice. Following through on Commitments to Support the Future of Syria and the Regional.

[23] Fresia & Lavigne Delville (2018) distinguish between 'comprehensive, operational and radical criticism' of aid.

power relationships underpinning these actions. In this way, the symbolic violence of aid – which is linked to its capacity to define and impose framings – is highlighted.

IV. <u>**Methodology**</u>

Unlike prior studies that were limited to the UNHCR's role,[24] my approach seeks to unravel the larger power configurations that determine the refugee regime. The methodology that I developed thus aims to shed light on the multiplicity of actors, practices, and rationales involved in this apparatus. This was achieved by studying interactions between the key social agents that represent the essence of governance.

My fieldwork is based on interviews, observations, and a documentary analysis. The approach is qualitative, empirically grounded, interpretative and inductive. Rather than verifying pre-established theoretical hypotheses, this study is focused primarily on revealing the singularity of these configurations through the field survey. The first challenge that I encountered in my research was how to empirically study refugee governance practices and deconstruct their broader social implications.

A) The assemblage ontology and the practice turn

I conceive of refugee governance as a complex assemblage of actors, ideas, technologies, rationalities, institutions and practices. Assemblage theory is a poststructuralist relational thinking which emerged during the 2000s, utilised on the grounds that it better supports the situated study of governance as a multiplicity (as opposed to a unitary process). It is an analytical response to the contingency and complexity of contemporary global governance (Briassoulis 2019; Bueger 2018). It is one explanation of the way in which heterogeneous elements including 'discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, moral and philanthropic propositions are assembled to address an 'urgent need' and invested with strategic purpose' (Murray Li 2007: 264). These elements are not, however, necessarily intended to work together, and this renders

---

[24] Such as Scalettaris, 2013; Fresia, 2014 & 2018; in countries other than Lebanon.

their cooperation fragile. Assemblage theory concerns the description of the 'making' of the arrangement or the 'on-going labour of bringing disparate elements together and forging connections between them' (Murray Li 2007: 263); it develops a distinct understanding of order and structures as based on practices and relations and the work required to maintain them. I posit that the assemblage ontology, with its practice-oriented and relational focus, provides a relevant framework to grasp the power configurations involved in my research.

Thus, assemblage theory falls into line with the 'practice turn' in international relations, explored by the third generation of global governance studies. Indeed, a broad range of scholars have argued 'to privilege practice as the key entry point to the study of world politics' (Adler & Pouliot 2011: 5): they define practice as first and foremost a performance in the form of patterned and competent behaviour informed by background knowledge. The emphasis is on the *how,* on connections between what people do as a matter of routine, and the power-knowledge sustaining their actions. The 'practice turn' has been deployed in migration and Critical Border Studies, emphasising the value of researching mundane practices for understanding the way policies are produced and experienced by a range of actors within and beyond the state (El Qadim 2015; Fine 2016; Infantino 2017). Deploying an analytic of assemblage allows to explore the practices that fill the gap between the will to govern and the refractory processes that make governance difficult. Assemblages depend on the relations they maintain. Thus, to explore how governance has been made possible in practice, the analytical and empirical task lies in examining the inner workings and patterns of the relations that actors have established, as well as the work required to create shared regulatory spaces and narratives.

I posit that the assemblage approach, with its practice-oriented, empirical and relational focus, provides a relevant framework to grasp depoliticisation and repoliticisation dynamics. On the one hand, depoliticisation plays a crucial role in assemblage theory as assemblages establish relations of expertise and authority, technology and politics (Murray Li 2007: 279–280). Assemblages involve 'anti-politics', meaning that political questions are downplayed 'as matters of technique' and 'debate about how and what to govern and the distributive effects of particular arrangements' is closed down 'by reference to expertise' (*ibid.*: 265). Yet, I posit that the added value of the assemblage ontology is to provide a theoretical framework to highlight (re)politicisation tactics. Indeed, assemblages recognise the multiplicity and hybridity of patterns of governance, as well as their contingency and instability. Thus, they allow for a decentred understanding of power as relational in nature, heterogeneous, situated and subject

to uncertainty; as a contingent and multiple force in relation to which assemblages are made and remade. Policy is 'always subject to contestation and reformulation by a range of pressures and forces it cannot contain' and 'resistance potential is always present' (Murray Li 2007: 386). If depoliticisation is a narrative empowering governance actors, repoliticisation has clear disruptive effects on this narrative and on the governance system it underpins.

Thus, repoliticisation tactics – in the same capacity as depoliticisation tactics – have an explanatory power on 'how' to assemble. By revealing the hidden politics behind the formation of assemblages, they make power dynamics and contingency the object of a narrative; and the diffusion of this narrative has repercussions on the perceived legitimacy of the assemblage and on its perpetuation. Further, both depoliticisation and (re)politicisation tactics shed light on the role of ideas, discourses and narratives to vest assemblages with meaning as well as to contest those meanings.

B) Interviews and observations

In-depth and semi-structured interviews provided the bulk of my data. Interviews were complemented by observations from my experience as a volunteer for the local NGO Nabad in the Beqaa from September 2018 to January 2019 and from attending several monthly consultation and coordination meetings between LCRP partners and the UNHCR, the EU, and partner NGOs, in Beirut, Zahle and Tripoli.

The first methodological challenge that I encountered was delimiting the perimeter of my research within an opaque humanitarian landscape that is often difficult to navigate. Beyond recognised institutional actors such as the UNHCR, I wanted to examine actors whose impact on the field is more complicated to assess, such as Arab donors. Studying both Western and Arab institutions raises particular challenges due to their unclear contours, multi-scalar and pluri-local modalities, and often informal decision-making processes, which link offices in Beirut to those in capitals cities of donor states through multiple chains of intermediaries. Decisions about the allocation of funding and strategic priorities are made not in Beirut, but at UNHCR headquarters or in donor states' capitals, as well as in Brussels. I consequently adopted

a multi-site approach by conducting a few interviews in Brussels and Paris (in addition to my work in Lebanon).

An exhaustive account would be an impossible task. I have chosen to focus on specific organisations based on their relevance in shaping the refugee regime and in establishing relations with Lebanese authorities. By examining different levels of discourse, from field actors to figures closer to decision-making, my work seeks to illustrate the diversity and hybrid nature of governance processes. The sample of around 127 interviews includes, among representatives of the international community, the following entities: the UNHCR, the WFP, and the IOM, European embassies and Foreign Affairs Ministries,[25] the EU delegation, the European Commission, ECHO, the ICMPD, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)[26] and a few international NGOs. It also includes members of Gulf organisations such as national Red Crescent Societies, KSRelief, Qatar Charity, and Kuwaiti institutions. Regarding Lebanese authorities, the sample is composed of representatives from Ministries that have played a role in the Syrian response, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for the political dimension), Home Affairs (for the security dimension), Social Affairs, Displaced Persons, and Education (for the operational aspect). I also included security actors engaged in border management such as GSO and Customs. Finally, I contacted representatives of several Lebanese municipalities with a strong Syrian presence, i.e. Tripoli, Ersaal, Baalbeck, and Halba – as well as religious authorities involved in aid programmes, such as Dar al Fatwa or local muftis. The final interview sample is composed Syrian individuals who have been through the registration or resettlement process, as well as members of local NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs), and religious charities that benefit from Gulf funding.[27] Given the prominence of their role as implementing partners of UN agencies, not including them in the sample would have entailed the risk of a very bias approach; I was particularly attentive to how they perceive UNHCR and key donors. These interviews were conducted in French, English and Arabic (with the help of translators). I conducted them in Lebanon during three stays, between August 2018 and January 2019, August 2019 and January 2020, and finally between

---

[25] Given its role as a key donor and its historical and cultural ties with Lebanon, I focused in particular on France.
[26] The ICRC is relevant for this study due to its interventions in remote and border areas as well as its policy to engage in direct contact and dialogue with all political actors, including non-state armed groups such as Hezbollah.
[27] Among national organisations, I paid particular attention to the Lebanese Red Cross due to its strong field presence in Lebanon.

September 2021 and December 2021. In between, I have conducted a few Skype interviews as well as interviews in Paris, and in Brussels in February 2020.

In general, the fieldwork progressed favourably – my informants were familiar with the presence and activity of researchers and understood my work and the importance of qualitative interviews. I was able to capitalise on my knowledge of the professional codes of these social settings – having briefly worked for European organisations and interned with the French delegation at the United Nations before my PhD – as well as on the trust established by my institutional affiliations, in particular the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) located in Beirut.

I nevertheless encountered a number of obstacles, particularly regarding accessibility and secrecy policies. Aid institutions are opaque establishments that often limit access to offices or meetings to members and are deeply invested in maintaining a public image of power and legitimacy (Fresia & Delville 2018: 12). In Lebanon, the inaccessibility of an institution such as the UNHCR is primarily physical, with tightly secured offices and employees who are difficult to reach or approach. Their white armoured vehicles exemplify 'the impressive logistical capacity of the organisation additionally reinforcing an imaginary of power surrounding it, and thus of suspicion' (Fresia 2009: 44). The UNHCR also exerts moral pressure on its employees by requiring them to sign a code of conduct that forbids disclosure of confidential information collected in the course of their duties which, although it has no legal standing, foments a culture of loyalty to the organisation.

Issues of access were also situational. The topic of Syrian refugees had crystallised certain tensions and polemics and was hence regarded as 'politically sensitive'. In June 2018, two months before my first field study, the former Foreign Affairs Minister Gebran Bassil threatened to halt the issuance of visas to UNHCR staff, accusing the organisation of having a 'hidden agenda' to keep refugees in Lebanon. This engendered a climate of distrust among agents and contributed to self-censorship during interviews and a reluctance to speak with researchers. Thus, I was concerned about receiving trustworthy responses that went beyond a reproduction of institutional rhetoric.

These difficulties are part of the investigative process. As noted by Bennani-Chraïbi (2010: 93), 'negotiating access to the field is already investigating'. The constraints on my work have

provided a meaningful point of departure from which to gather data and raise broader questions. Topics deemed sensitive or confidential reveal certain actors' policies of neutrality or communication, and their refusal or willingness to divulge certain information can suggest acceptance of the status quo (Alles, Guilbaud & Lagrange 2016) or, conversely, an act of resistance. Consequently, in contrast to the UNHCR, the few interviews I conducted with representatives of the Lebanese Foreign Affairs Ministry (who were as difficult to reach as those UNHCR officials) took the form of a 'political performance' in which they denounced the externalisation policies of the European countries that I represented as a French citizen.

Secrecy prompts ethical questions concerning the anonymisation and use of collected data: thus, interviewees' names have been anonymised and personally identifiable information has been removed in order to protect the identity of participants. By limiting the information disclosed regarding interviewees to the name of their organisation (most of these having high turnover rates), and the month and place of the interview, anonymity has been ensured: this information does not allow the reader to identify interviewees directly or indirectly as each description could refer to at least five different individuals. Secrecy also raises doubts about the reliability of interviewees' statements, thus necessitating specific verification methods. For this reason, I conducted a wide range of interviews (in terms of organisations, positions, and nationalities) and compared testimonies, paying close attention to assumptions generated – both consciously and unconsciously – by hegemonic thinking. I also took the constraints of the interview setting into consideration – due to the culture of secrecy mentioned above, these dialogues could not be considered an 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas 1990).

Accordingly, I developed a context-sensitive approach by targeting individuals in positions involving lower political stakes, such as project managers, assistants, and former employees (these organisations have a significant turnover rate). While heads of office and directors of external relations rarely ventured beyond the standard rhetorical position of their organisation, individuals with less 'official' functions spoke more freely. Moreover, beyond affiliates charged with briefing external participants, I was often referred to individuals who were accustomed to speaking with researchers and expressed interest in their initiatives.

An additional challenge was purely logistical – establishing contact with Lebanese actors was possible almost exclusively through informal channels. I relied primarily upon recommendations and vicarious contacts, sources that proved increasingly fruitful as my field

research progressed. Most local NGOs lacked websites – this was particularly the case with many grassroot organisations and religious charities recipient of Gulf funding – and the contact information of representatives of local or religious authorities was not publicly available.

Interviews were semi-structured, which required designing a grid of open, indirect questions tailored to each interviewee, and that may be changed according to the dynamic of the interview. This approach can be considered both inductive and holistic, as it accounts for the imbrication of varying social dimensions. This style of interview (as opposed to directive interviews) presented distinct advantages, as it was adapted to interviewees' knowledge or willingness to communicate. Informants were provided an opportunity to voice their own perspectives and concerns, offering valuable insight into their experiences and ideals. My studies are primarily concerned with political processes rather than environments, for which an ethnographic study or non-directive interviews would have been more appropriate.

Since the beginning of my fieldwork, I have routinely been denied permission to record interviews, particularly with UNHCR officers. The act of asking permission often contributed to an atmosphere of distrust, resulting in self-censorship from my informants regardless of whether they consented or refused. As a result, I sometimes chose notetaking over recording, which ensured confidentiality and helped establish trust.

To facilitate exchanges, I introduced my research in a broad, polysemic manner without mentioning politically charged topics. My initial questions touched upon the Syrian response in general, the 'disembodied' aid apparatus, and the norms and long-term visions mobilised by my interviewees. When the context was favourable, I gradually addressed more controversial subjects, such as returns, donor interests, and constraint mechanisms. In sensitive contexts, I avoided framing direct questions, instead approaching them from within the narratives expressed by interviewees regarding the interests, motives, and responsibilities that underly refugee policies.

To analyse my data, I draw on Fairclough (2003)'s conception of discourse as a social practice that constructs social identities, social relations, and the knowledge and meaning systems of the social world. Discourse both reflects and produces the ideas and assumptions relating to the ways in which personal identities, social relations and knowledge systems are constituted through social practice. In other words, language does not have a fixed, objective meaning, but

is conditioned by a whole range of situational factors: the author's belief system; the surrounding political, economic and social context, any professional community to which the person belongs as well as the immediate situation in which the words were uttered (Fairclough *ibid.*). This approach draws on the Foucauldian analysis defining discourses as meaning formations that provide an effective lens for producing knowledge about a topic in concrete contexts and institutions (Foucault 1972). Following this view, discourses produce social reality through the development of a hegemonic knowledge which competes against other discourses for dominance. This constructivist conception of discourse assumes a dialectical relationship between discursive events and the situations and social structures in which they are embedded: on the one hand, social contexts shape and affect discourse; on the other hand, through discourses, social actors influence and constitute knowledge, situations and social roles. Following Potter & Mulkay (1985) and Potter & Wetherell (1988)'s methodology, instead of looking for discursive consistency at the individual level, I search for 'common discursive resources' or 'repertoires' (Potter & Wetherell 1988: 172) circulating between different actors.

I emphasise repertoires falling within discursive practices of depoliticisation: I identity speech patterns of denying or concealing deliberation or agency, while emphasising expertise or technicisation. I pay attention to 'problematisation and technicisation routines' (Murray Li 2007: 244) allowing the UNHCR and other international entities to disseminate their political and moral frames of reference and their institutional models. This way, I aim to point out the power and influence of these particular narratives and their potential societal, ideological and institutional effects. Thus, I observe the constant, multifaceted and multi-localised work of legitimisation; as 'the process by which speakers accredit or licence a type of social behaviour,' enacted by 'argumentation, that is, by providing arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc.' (Reyes 2011: 782). Conversely, I also observe signs of (re)politicisation, such as deliberation, debate, and an emphasis on political agency and interests.

The concept of 'active interviewing' proved useful: I conceive of interviews as 'developmental', i.e. sites of meaning-making between the interviewer and the interviewee in which data are not only gathered but also made (Holstein & Gubrium 1997). I have been sensitive to my interviewees' positionality and individual concrete situation. Indeed, the humanitarian sector is crossed by structural inequalities, between international and local employees as well as between organisations – with local NGOs depending on donor or IO's

funding. Thus, one's job security or insecurity and hierarchical position can influence the confidence or reluctance to disclose information. By scrutinising the actors' discourses and practices involved in creating policies, I have analysed the interactions and power dynamics between them. In doing so, I aim to show that migration governance in Lebanon is the result of a social and confrontational process of negotiation.

C) Desk Research

Discourses in the humanitarian field include those elaborated by actors to describe and justify their action or call for donation, in particular the grey literature and secondary sources that, through their terminologies, paradigms, and prescriptions, convey the dominant norms of decision-making centres. The challenge presented by texts produced by transnational entities – donors, the EU, UN agencies, or international NGOs – was their sheer density. The interview process enabled me to identify key texts quoted by my informants as the frameworks that guided their actions.

The limitations of interviews lie precisely in the fact that they privilege discursive realities whose reliability can be problematic because they tend to emphasise idealised view of social processes or to focus on positive aspects and downplay issues perceived as sensitive. Thus, I sought to assess critically their perception of the reality and to question the rhetorical accounts to which I was exposed in a systematic manner. My study of institutional literature thus attempts to highlight incongruences between the formulation of and actual implementation of policies, and between real and stated interests.

My methodological approach necessarily entailed the risk of accessing only segments of reality and thus acquiring only a shallow understanding of the exhaustive pathway of decisions and their concrete effects. To limit this risk, I adhered to the principle of 'eclecticism of sources', which was suitable for evaluating these narratives and allowed for extensive data triangulation. This approach requires a systematic dialogue between evidence and analytical concepts that facilitates 'breaking phenomena down into their constituent parts and viewing them in relation to the whole they form' (Griffin & Ragin 1994). Triangulation is essential for attaining the degree of 'saturation' necessary to draw satisfactory conclusions (*ibid.*; Baxter & Jack 2008).

In addition, I have attempted to develop a sense of self-reflexivity and to deconstruct my own situated point of view. Indeed, my perceptions are permeated by Eurocentric readings of migration policies and of Lebanese politics that might be conducive to reductive understandings. To avoid such pitfalls, I started the literature review by delving into recent scholarly and theoretical work on the Lebanese state and society, and on regional migration dynamics.

V. Summary of chapters

Chapter one

The construction of Lebanon as a 'weak', 'absent' and 'fragmented' state

The first chapter, exclusively based on existing literature, examines the dominant narratives on Lebanon's politics that will prove crucial to the legitimisation of international interventions. I provide a brief account of Lebanon's recent history, in particular its political system and its complex relationship with Syria, including the porous border governance between the two countries. Then, I point to the hegemony of the 'weakness paradigm' to describe the Lebanese state by academics and IO professionals. This paradigm relies on a set of simplistic assumptions that 'pathologise' the state by framing it as absent, afflicted by fragmentation and bad governance, and that technicise it by conceiving of its policy choices as an absence of choice, thus downplaying its political agency. I offer an account of recent scholarly works putting forth a new series of terms (conceptually more sophisticated) with which to describe the Lebanese state and grasp its modalities of action, including those of hybridity and neo-patrimonialism; these shed light on the systemic features of the Lebanese state. Finally, I offer an examination of the Lebanese government's responses to Syrian refugee arrivals: first assessed as a 'policy of no-policy', these have actually shown the strategic thinking and ingrained political repertoire of the Lebanese authorities.

Chapter two

Lebanon's refugee regime: security and humanitarian paradigms

The second chapter describes the nuances of the depoliticisation of UNHCR interventions. I posit that depoliticisation mechanisms target the Lebanese state by promoting an essentialised

vision of Lebanon and of its capacity limitations to legitimise foreign interventions. This depoliticisation also entails the promotion of a narrative of good cooperation between the international donor community and the host state, smoothing out disagreements; and includes tactics of technocratic distancing, neutrality claims and vulnerability politics. Then, the chapter focuses on the logics of action permeating UNHCR policies related to Syrian mobility: it deconstructs the politics surrounding refugee registration and de-registration to illustrate the securitisation logic inherent to the UNHCR's work. It also unpacks the deployment of technologies of governance in resettlement programmes designed for Syrian refugees, resulting in the UNHCR becoming part of the border apparatus. Peer policing and the disciplining of sexual and gender identities construct 'deserving' refugees through the cultural and gendered performance of persecution in home countries. I point to the UNHCR's depoliticised approach to return: embedded in a sedentary order which essentialises the link between Syrians and their nation states, this approach is facilitated by the fragmentation of return initiatives and goes through the assertion of the 'voluntary' character of returns (despite lack of empirical validity).

Chapter three

Lebanon's border regime: European externalisation and border management policies

In this chapter, I explore depoliticisation mechanisms regarding international border interventions, essentially on the Lebanon-Syria border. First, I point to the prevalence of externalisation logics, discourses and frames in European interventions: Lebanon has been constructed by the international community as a 'dangerized' place, embedded in a European agenda of externalisation of migratory controls. I argue that European security professionals have provided a technical 'problematisation' of Lebanon's border and security assemblage, interpreted as symptomatic of unfinished state-building. This lays the basis for legitimising the ICMPD's interventions, putting forth its need-based and technocratic solutions: the Integrated Border Management approach (IBM) is presented as a way to overcome sectarian patterns of rule. I draw attention to the diffusion of the paradigm of migration management, with its selective, orderly and neoliberal ordeal; this paradigm has been accepted and even instrumentalised by Lebanese state officials for their own benefits, in order to legitimise their policy of increased control. Finally, I shed light on specific mechanisms of depoliticisation mobilised by the ICMPD, i.e. a humanitarian border rationality and a bottom-up approach enhancing the role of local communities in bordering processes. In this chapter, I show that the ICMPD technicises Lebanon's border assemblage by framing it as a symptom of state weakness

and lack of sovereignty, and not as the result of historical cross-border circulations. This technical interpretation is a form of depoliticisation since it fixes issues in a context of technical deficiencies and regulations while avoiding putting them into politics. The fact that the ICMPD supports a state-driven model makes this diagnosis of state weakness all the more crucial for the legitimatisation of its interventions: the ICMPD needs a state to act upon.

Chapter four

Repoliticisation: reactivating the political character of refugee governance

This chapter examines the dynamics of 'repoliticisation' of the refugee regime in Lebanon, understood as a discursive process revealing deliberation, choice and political interests in decision-making. I first point to the repoliticisation (and delegitimisation) of Western interests by local actors: it manifests through criticism towards the EU agenda of border externalisation and the 'tactic of distancing' that puts the UNHCR on the frontlines. Then, I turn to the disruptive effects of repoliticisation practices, such as open conflicts and practices of resistance, as well as their effects in terms of power balance: indeed, the Lebanese authorities have gained leverage over the donor community and the UNHCR, whose space of operation has been shrinking when it comes to return policies. The last section unravels the role of the Lebanese civil society, between depoliticisation and resistance practices, by showing that Lebanese NGOs are co-opted in transnational governmentality despite attempts to resist international norms and narratives. In the end, rather than studying repoliticisation as an isolated phenomena, this chapter highlights the constant 'coming and going' between depoliticisation and repoliticisation.

Chapter five

Gulf donors and organisations: an alternative model of refugee governance

This chapter examines the role of Gulf actors in responding to Syrian refugee arrivals. It points to the construction of Gulf donors and organisations as politicised, and investigates whether this politicisation necessarily leads to stigmatisation or decreased authority (as the previous chapters have shown that the legitimisation of IOs lies in their depoliticisation). Gulf states' responses have not been through the process of technocratic distancing characterising the responses of the traditional donor community, and have been stigmatised as being the result of

Gulf states' strategic choices, and in particular of their support to Islamic militancy. However, this model of governance prone to politicisation has also led to higher degrees of visibility and influence at the local level, granting it legitimacy. Religious and identity-based humanitarianism also plays a role in the legitimisation of Gulf donorship: it is prone to politicisation but has depoliticising effect as it is presented as the result of a moral necessity. Finally, through 'pragmatic legitimacy' Gulf organisations have asserted their own criteria of professionalism putting forth their concrete efficiency in responding spontaneously to local needs. Yet, they have also complied with Western donors' forms of depoliticised governmentality in order to access the field and legitimise their interventions without fully integrating the UN structures.

Chapter one: The 'construction' by foreign actors of Lebanon as a weak, absent and divided state.

This first chapter, exclusively based on existing literature, aims at describing the context underlying the research. I examine the foundational and dominant narratives on Lebanon's politics which, I argue, have been crucial to the legitimisation of international interventions. First, I provide a brief account of Lebanon's recent history, in particular the formation of its political system and its complex relationship with Syria. I shed light on the Lebanon-Syria border as a 'quasi-border' (Picard 2016: 23) with patterns of porousness and hybrid sovereignty defying conventional expectations grounded in the nation-state. Second, I point to the hegemony of the 'weakness paradigm' to describe the Lebanese state by academics and IO professionals. This paradigm relies on a set of simplistic assumptions that 'pathologise' the state by framing it as absent, afflicted by fragmentation and bad governance, and downplaying its political agency. As explained in the following chapters, this 'weakness' paradigm is at the centre of IO practice and discourse and is not neutral: it determines the *modus operandi* of foreign interventions and provides crucial arguments for their legitimisation. In my research, I will be adopting an attitude of deconstruction regarding this culturalist and essentialist narrative, by taking the representation of a country hopelessly incapable of governing itself as an object of investigation, rather than as a tool with which to analyse its social reality. Third, I shed light on new theoretical paradigms that have overcome these simplistic constructions by offering a better account of the workings of the Lebanese state, i.e. those of 'hybrid sovereignties' and 'neo-patrimonialism' which highlight the systemic features of this state. Finally, I end this contextual chapter by offering an examination of the Lebanese government's responses to Syrian refugee arrivals: first assessed as a 'policy of no-policy', these have actually shown the strategic thinking and ingrained political repertoire of the Lebanese authorities.

By examining the hegemony of the weakness paradigm, this first chapter lays the basis for chapter two and chapter three. Indeed, this perception of Lebanon has determined the modus operandi of foreign interventions. Both the UNHCR (chapter two) and the ICMPD (chapter three)'s interventions entail a problematisation of the Lebanese state as 'weak': to legitimise their interventions, these IOs have established a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, fragmentation, and a country perpetually in crisis.

I. Putting Lebanon's politics and borders into historical perspective

First, I examine the foundational and dominant narratives on Lebanon's politics, stemming from the formation of its political system as one of sectarian power-sharing and its complex relationship with Syria. The Lebanon-Syria border presents patterns of porousness and hybrid sovereignty defying conventional expectations grounded in the nation-state. These aspects have been framed by international institutions and academics as further evidence that Lebanon is not fully formed as a nation-state.

A) Lebanon's political system: the institutionalisation of a sectarian power-sharing model

Lebanon has been through difficult times to constitute itself as a 'precarious republic' (Hudson, 1968): it gained independence in 1943 after being part of the Ottoman Empire and under the 1923 French mandate. Sectarianism was then institutionalised in the form of corporate consociational power sharing arrangements: political power was devolved along confessional lines, with a Maronite President, a Sunni Prime Minister and a Shia leader of the legislature, and sects were represented proportionally in the cabinet with parity between Christian and Muslim denominations in the Parliament.

> 'Control of state institutions and revenues by an overlapping alliance of sectarian/political and economic elite consecrates a sectarian institutional set up and lubricates sophisticated clientelist networks that co-opt large segments of the population, thus ensuring that the Lebanese remain unequal sectarian subjects compartmentalised in self-managed communities, rather than citizens with inalienable rights' (Salloukh et al. 2016: 2).

In this system, sects serve as enlarged clientelist networks designed to compete for market benefits and the appropriation of social wealth and state services: if Lebanon's political parties[28] are called sectarian, in essence they are elitist, serving themselves rather than their so-called communities.[29]

During the 1960s, Lebanon went through a phase of economic liberalism, relative state assertion and cultural development under the presidential mandates of Fouad Chehab and Charles Helou, visible with thriving press, edition and university sectors, granting it the reputation of 'Switzerland of the Middle East'. In the context of Israeli attacks and Palestinians contestation, the Civil War from 1975 to 1990 has enshrined the power of militias against the state, and the term 'Lebanonisation' has since then been used to indicate the destructive fragmentation of a country. The 1989 Taëf agreements put an end to the civil war without challenging the political and sectarian order. At the same time, Lebanon has been praised for its so-called 'resilience' and in particular 'generosity' towards refugees. Indeed, the small country has received Armenian refugees in 1916 after the genocide, allowing them a certain degree of economic integration and political representation, and Palestinian refugees since 1948 – however, these have faced broad socioeconomic discrimination and multiple restrictive measures limiting their mobility.[30] Lebanon has also hosted Iraqi refugees since the 2003 American invasion, before hosting Syrian refugees from 2011 onwards.

Over the past few years, the Lebanese population has mobilised to express their discontent with the country's political elites and post-civil war political order: with huge protests during the 2015 garbage crisis and with the October 2019 nationwide protests, shedding light on the absence of public services as well as the authoritarian and corrupted character of the political class.

---

[28] Lebanon's main parties are Hezbollah and Amal for the Shia community, the Future Movement among Lebanon's Sunnis, and the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Forces, and Kataeb (the Lebanese Phalangist Party) among Maronite Christians, as well as the Progressive Socialist Party for the country's Druze.

[29] Atallah (2018) has shown how Lebanon's electoral law results in gerrymandering, which allows elites to select their constituency rather than voters electing their representatives; thus, Members of Parliament are hardly aware of citizens' concerns and do not legislate on citizens' priorities (Atallah *ibid*.).

[30] Palestinians are excluded from the universal regime of legal protection based on the UNHCR's mandate, falling under the UNRWA (cf. Chapter two).

B) Lebanon's border areas: porosity, fluidity and informal economy

Apart from Lebanon's political system, the Lebanon-Syria borderland is another crucial element that has led to the assumption of state weakness among IOs and academics. More than a simple demarcation, borders have been described as 'a metaphorical link to a country's national identity' (Picard 2016: 326) or 'a political-psychological fixation'. In her book on Lebanon-Syria relations, Picard quotes Barth's (1969 cited in Picard 2016: 327) definition of the border as 'an imprecise zone at the confines of two states, whose division is never achieved and the control often deficient. A conceptual line, imaginary and affective that social groups carry and reproduce in their process of identity construction'. This definition allows to make sense of the process of formation of the Lebanon-Syria border, described as a 'quasi-border' (Picard 2016) or a 'security assemblage' (Tholens 2017) with patterns of porousness and hybrid sovereignty defying conventional expectations based on the nation-state.

1. *The border: an 'artificial colonial creation of the 1920s'*

Historically, the Lebanon-Syria border has been contested, porous and ill-defined (Picard, 2016; Kaufman, 2014). This 'fluid borderland' (Picard, *ibid*.), never fully demarcated on the ground, results from a series of zones of influence and mandates in the region. During the Ottoman Empire, a state-building process started at the level of the *mutsarrifiya* (autonomous subdivision) of Mount-Lebanon from 1861 to 1914, though in the Levant the differentiation of national identity based on ethnic or religious characteristics seemed then irrelevant. Then, in 1916, the Sykes-Picot agreement drew the delimitations of the future nations according to the colonial needs of Great Britain and France (Meier 2013). The declaration of the Republic of Lebanon in 1926 sealed the separation between Lebanon and Syria (Picard 2016: 27), the constitution unilaterally affirming the broad outlines of its boundaries. Chalcraft (2008: 20) describes this border as an 'artificial colonial creation of the 1920s' leading to the arbitrary division of social groups. Indeed, Lebanon's new border areas, previously not part of Mount-Lebanon, lost their direct social, economic and trade relations with Syria, without being economically, politically and socially integrated into the Lebanese state: 'along the eastern and

norther borders with Syria, central authorities have never fully exercised control over territorial borders, which for decades were seen as spaces of interaction and exchange rather than frontiers' (Tholens 2017: 872).

2. *'A quasi border' between two 'quasi states'*[31]

Lebanon's geographical area consists of 10,400 square km, the majority of which consists of land (10,230 square km), and a small, claimed part territorial sea.[32] To the West, Lebanon's coastline borders the Mediterranean with 225 km. By land, Lebanese territory borders with Syria to the North and East (375 km) and Israel in the South (79 km). The borderland with Syria contains large areas of 'green border' (*i*.e. mountain, flat and river borders) that are challenging to control and marginalised, with the absence of state institutions, the presence of Hezbollah (in the Beqaa), the prevalence of an informal economy, and a lack of official political representation. Exchanges between these 'two unfinished nation-states' (Picard 2016: 17) are limited to Lebanese consuming goods and services from Syria (food, medicine, schools and hospitals) and traders smuggling goods from Lebanon to Syria (electronic, cigarettes…). There are five official land crossing points (BCPs) along the border with Syria: Arida on the Mediterranean coast between Tartous and Tripoli, Aboudieh in Akkar, and Boukayaa, Masnaa and Qaa in the Beqaa Valley.

The Civil War economy prompted cross-border circulation which shaped a dense network of inter-connexions serving the interest of militias and occupying powers. Following the war, under Syrian military control, the borderland became a real 'transborder power system' (Picard 2016) at the service of the political economy of the Syrian domination; therefore, the reconstruction of Lebanon and the liberalisation of the Syrian economy became two interrelated phenomena. The Beqaa Valley became a 'territorial in-between' (Bennafla 2005, cited in Picard 2016: 335), with its agricultural economy, urban networks and commercial practices transformed by thirty years of Syrian military presence and exchanges. Even following its withdrawal in 2005, the Syrian Army has continued to cross the border around the first

---

31 Kossayfi evokes about a 'quasi border' separating those 'quasi states' (al Akhabar, 29 August 2014, cited in Picard 2016).
32 Source : World Atlas.

Lebanese villages in order to control the smuggling of strategic products (cement, drug, fuel, etc.) while weapon supplying from Hezbollah has persisted.

The demarcation of the Lebanon-Syria border has been severely neglected by the Mandate authorities and then by the governments of the independent states (Khalifah 2006). As a result, still now, the 'border boundaries on official Syrian and Lebanese maps present, in the details, a lot of divergences' (Verdeil 2005): following the Syrian withdrawal and the Israeli war, the international community called upon both the Lebanese and Syrian governments to initiate a process of border demarcation (with the aim to prevent the flow of arms into Lebanon for Hezbollah), as enacted in article 5 of the resolution 1680 (17 May 2006) of the Security Council. Following the 2006 Israeli attacks, the United Nations 1701 resolution (11 August 2006) reinforced the FINUL and reiterated such demands. In the conclusions of their 2007 and 2008 reports, the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team and the newly formed 'Common Border Lebanese Force' emphasised the extreme porosity of the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon, the inefficiency of existing border posts, and a lack of coordination with Syrian authorities.[33] These reports insisted on the urgency to delineate the border and make it monitored by trained and mobile teams, and called on the Lebanese government to 'secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms or related material'. Finally, in 2008, as the Lebanese and Syrian governments agreed to establish diplomatic ties, they also agreed to begin the process of demarcation of Lebanon's Northern border (Mouawad 2020).

C) Lebanon and Syria as 'intimate strangers' (Picard 2016)

As mentioned in the introduction, post-war 'pax Syria' has been characterised by overt Syrian tutelage in Lebanon, during which Syria negotiated with the Lebanese government a series of bilateral treaties — including the 1964 Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination — conferring mobility and labour privileges to Syrians in Lebanon.[34] After the killing of former

---

[33] Source : Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team reports, 2007 & 2008, available at : https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2007%20382.pdf, [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
[34] Namely, the 1962 Law Regulating the Entry of Foreigners into Lebanon, their Stay and their Exit from Lebanon; the 1962 Law n°320 on the Control of Entry and Exit from Lebanese border posts; the 1964 By-law n°17561 Regulating the Work of Foreigners in Lebanon and its amendment; and the 1925 Decree n°15 modified by the Law of 11 January 1960.

Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005, massive public protests against the Syrian presence led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops in Lebanon. Yet, the Syrian regime continued to wield significant influence over the country in the post-2005 period through its political allies.[35] According to Picard (2016: 23), the 'volatility of representations and fluidity of practices on the Lebanon-Syria 'quasi-border' did not put an end to the dense relationships between state and societies':

> 'The construction in the two national spaces of a citizenship bond between the populations and the state (which is at the same time one institution, one administrative apparatus and one actor) is clearly defective. The establishment of their international sovereignty remains unachieved almost a century after their foundation, because of the perpetuation with Israel and the persistence of political interferences and Syrian territorial encroachments in Lebanon' (*ibid*.: 358).

During the 1990s and the 2000s, the postwar reconstruction of Lebanon and the liberalisation of the Syrian economy developed as two interwoven processes; and the Lebanon-Syria economic integration imposed by Damascus has had structuring effects on social stratification and power hierarchies (Picard 2016: 21). In a borderland marked by blurred sovereignties, authorities, material and symbolic capital and identities (Leenders 2017: 63; Picard 2016: 338) as well as by transborder conflicts, the population has privileged family and local belongings and affinities (Chatty, Mansour & Yassin 2013).

The Syrian war has prompted significant transformations in the way the Lebanese periphery relates to the core: the Eastern border, historically porous, has increasingly come to be seen as a militarised buffer between the war in Syria and the relative calm of Lebanon. Following the terminology employed by Wilson & Donnan (1998: 4, 7 & 21, cited in Picard 2016: 327), this border shifted from being a 'periphery', loosely connected to both Beirut and Damascus, to being a 'boundary', a strong demarcation between two countries.[36]

---

[35] Composed of Sunni and Christian parties and led by the Sunni Future Current, the anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance holds friendly stances toward the West and Saudi Arabia. The March 8 Alliance, whose key protagonists are the two Shia parties, and the Christian Free Patriotic Movement is keen on preserving ties with the Syrian and Iranian regimes.

[36] In chapter three, I will show how the ICMPD technicises Lebanon's border assemblage by framing it as a symptom of state weakness and lack of sovereignty, and not as the result of historical cross-border circulations.

This section has examined the foundational and dominant narratives on Lebanon's politics, stemming from the formation of its political system as one of sectarian power-sharing and the Lebanon-Syria border with patterns of porousness defying conventional expectations grounded in the nation-state. These aspects have been framed by international institutions and academics as further evidence that Lebanon is not fully formed as a nation-state, which serve the narrative of 'state weakness'.

II.   <u>The 'politics of labelling': a seemingly absent, weak and fragmented state</u>

In this section, I point to the hegemony of the 'weakness paradigm' to describe the Lebanese state. This paradigm relies on a set of simplistic assumptions that 'pathologise' the state by framing it as absent, afflicted by fragmentation and bad governance, and that technicise it by framing its policy choices as an absence of choice, thus downplaying its political agency. As it set out in the following chapters, this paradigm, at the centre of expert practice and discourse, is not neutral: it determines the *modus operandi* of foreign interventions and provides crucial arguments for their legitimisation.

A) The paradigm of state weakness

Weak state is a concept that has been popularised in the jargon of 'international relations' professionals and think-tank analysts after the end of the Cold War and adopted by scholarly literature on state formation and state-building in the context of the 'global war on terror'. State fragility is defined as a state's inability to meet its citizens' basic needs and expectations and to provide public services. Weak states have 'capacity gaps': the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines a weak state as a state which 'has weak capacity to carry out basic functions of governing a population and its territory' (OECD 2011: 6). A weak state also 'lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive and reinforcing relations with society' (*ibid*.: 6), thus missing a social contract as a source of legitimacy. In addition, there is not one single political authority with the legitimate monopole of violence: weak states struggle to provide security against internal and external threats. They are thus perceived as potentially

threatening to international security, making governance complex and unpredictable, and prone to regional interference, political instability and internal competition.

In this view, the difference between 'failed states' and weak ones is one of degree: if in the 2000s policy analysts conceived of Indonesia, Pakistan and Colombia as weak states, the label of failed state was used to refer to situations with the collapse of state institutions such as Rwanda, Haiti, Liberia, Congo, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan. Study of weak and failed states are informed by culturally specific assumptions about what a successful state should look like: they discard any reality that does not live up to an abstract European ideal. The Failed States Index, published annually since 2005 by the US think tank Fund for Peace and the magazine *Foreign Policy* illustrates this normative and Eurocentric roots state-centric bias, as well as this definition of failed states *versus* strong states by Rosa Ehrenreich Brooks (2005: 1161-1162):

> 'Successful states control defined territories and populations, conduct diplomatic relations with other states, monopolise legitimate violence within their territories, and succeed in providing adequate social goods to their populations. Failed states, their dark mirror image, lose control over the means of violence, and cannot create peace or stability for their populations or control their territories. They cannot ensure economic growth or any reasonable distribution of social goods. They are often characterised by massive economic inequities, warlordism, and violent competition for resources.'

B) The 'pathologisation' of the Lebanese state: the illusion of power vacuum

Descriptions of the Lebanese state have fallen in line with this pathologic approach to governance: 'scholars usually characterise the Lebanese state as weak, broken down, irrelevant, or absent' (Bauman & Mouawad 2017: 66-67). Two approaches have dominated analysis of Lebanese state weakness: first, a Westphalian one, considering it weak in relation to external actors. Second, a Weberian one, considering the state's internal position vis-à-vis other societal actors, as a state unable to penetrate society and impose its will, which allows interferences from both non-state actors and foreign powers (*ibid.*). Bauman & Mouawad add that such assumption of weakness draws on four 'tropes': first, the idea that the Lebanese society is

essentially segmented into sociocultural units as political actors who have captured the state. Second, the assumption that the state cannot claim the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within its territory. Third, that regional actors' interferences is a symptom of weakness. Finally, the idea that the laissez-faire economy is built on minimal state intervention with a clientelist system filling the vacuum left by the state.

The weakness paradigm also entails a 'dominant ideology [which] reduces the Lebanese society to a blend of fearful sects (Zbeeb 2022: 33), a 'promised land for anxious minorities' (citing Michel Chiha 1962). This was the foundational narrative of Lebanon's political economy ever since its creation a hundred years ago:

> 'The *pathologization or* 'sectarianization', tends to identify sectarian identities as a single frame of identification when there are none or many more than one. Failure is then defined as the result of the inability of different pre-modern, sectarian groups to work together toward the establishment of a modern, secular state' (Kosmatopoulos 2011: 128).

This image of Lebanon as a 'weak' country plagued by sectarian divisions and chronic incapacity suffers the effects of an essentialising lens, which deciphers local political processes on the basis of allegedly immutable categories of identity. For the international community, such a lens induces a Manichean interpretation of crisis, which effectively reduces Lebanese affairs to the status of a confrontation between pro-Western, pro-democratisation sectarian communities, and those communities in which 'Islamism' is the driving force, allied to Damascus and Teheran.

Such readings induce a reification of sectarian dynamics and national fragmentation, and a pathologisation of features such as the lack of institutional cohesion, the fragmentation of decision-making but also of society along multiple fault-lines, the competition of political powerholders, etc. The assessment of the Lebanese state's 'weakness' stems mostly from a technical and an institutionalist perspective focusing on the viability, functions, and capacity of the institutions of the state (as opposed to legitimacy approaches, more concerned with the legitimacy that central authorities can generate and where democracy is perceived as a factor

of state strength).[37] These features are presented as not intentional and stemming from the proliferation of non-state actors such as Hezbollah. The following assessment by Kamrava et al. (2014) epitomises perfectly this assumption of state weakness:

> 'Along with Yemen and Sudan, Lebanon remains one of the Middle East's chronically weak states. Lebanon was born weak, with the institutional design of its state having sentenced it to a life of weakness. The unwritten National Pact of 1943 assigns state voices based on an archaic and artificial confessional distribution that from early on was more fiction that fact. The design of the state along confessional lines only perpetuated the hold of sub-national loyalties and identities, maintaining also the influence and powers of local notables (*zuama*), and impeding the development of state power and capacity […]. By the time the impact of the Syrian civil war was felt in the northern parts of the country, the Lebanese state had already taken itself to the edge of the precipice and back several times' (Kamrava et al. 2014: 17-18).

Nikolas Kosmatopoulos (2011) has argued for the necessity of a critical assessment of expert discourse on 'state failure'. He attempted to 'explore ethnographically how the concept works and how it produces unexpected effects that are highly political and relevant': indeed, peace expertise has reproduced a Hobbesian conception of the Lebanese state as a 'failed Leviathan' (117), fuelling narratives of state pathologisation, alienation and sectarisation. In particular, the concept of ethnic conflict was disseminated within the much larger discursive framework of 'culturalisation of violence':

> 'This practice, which I call 'sectarianisation', tends to identify sectarian identities as a single frame of identification when there are none or many more than one. It works through a series of selective and circular assumptions, at the end of which stands what the study perceives as 'state failure'. Failure is then defined as the result of the inability of different pre-modern, sectarian groups to work together toward the establishment of a modern, secular state' (*ibid*.: 128).

---

[37] Indeed, even though Lebanon presents a mix of democratic and autocratic features, its democratic character has been hitherto validated by the international community.

C) A country under an 'aid regime'

The success of the paradigm of weakness is to be contextualised within the consensus which has emerged in the global development community in the 1990s that 'poor governance and corruption undermine efforts in the South to fight poverty, to improve access to basic services, to establish responsible governance and to improve the quality of life for all' (Koechlin 2013: 25). Thus, governance and capacity-building deficits became 'political concepts' (134) produced by development and humanitarian discourses to shape social realities by justifying material interventions. This narrative has legitimised a series of donor interventions targeting the Lebanese state. Indeed, since the end of the Civil War, foreign donors and aid agencies have been a key pillar of financial sustainability for successive Lebanese governments, with the Paris I, II and III conferences (respectively held in 2001, 2002 and 2007), the 2018 CEDRE conference which offered financial aid conditional on structural reforms – in the framework of the International Support Group for Lebanon, promising 11 billion USD. These series of conferences have clear neoliberal underpinnings as their declared aim is to 'save Lebanon from bankruptcy' and push the state towards neoliberal reforms, economic, financial and social restructuring. During the CEDRE conference, the Lebanese government committed to do a series of reform, including provision and modernisation of basic infrastructures including electricity, transportation and water, but also to reduce the deficit with austerity measures and privatisation. In 2018 also took place the Rome II Conference aiming to improve Lebanon's security capacities. In addition, in the framework of the Syrian response, the 2016 London and the now annual (since 2017) Brussels Conferences have offered donations for refugee reception. More recently, the 2021 international donor conferences has raised 370 USD million in aid for Lebanon. My contention is that these conferences contribute to technical and depoliticised narratives by representing Lebanon as an absent state afflicted by bad governance, framing its policy choices either as an absence of choice, or as a product of incompetence.

III.   Against the weak state paradigm: locating the Lebanese state in Social Theory

Social scientists have questioned the weakness paradigm (Hermez 2015; Ghamroun 2014) showing that 'state weakness does not explain how politics works' (Mouawad & Bauman 2017: 70). Without recategorising the Lebanese state as 'strong' state, a new series of terms with which to describe the Lebanese state and grasp its modalities of action has been popularised, relativising state weakness. For instance, Mouawad & Bauman (2016) have presented alternatives (respectively Marxist and postmodern) theoretical approaches to the state. First, against the existing scholarship assuming that the 'weak' Lebanese state plays no role in shaping the country's laissez-faire capitalism, they have shown the central bank's role in reconfiguring capitalism. Second, drawing on a Foucauldian approach, they pointed to the 'state effect': despite the Army's inability to fully control the territory, in regions such as Akkar the state is ultimately 'incorporated' in society and present in everyday talks and citizens' expectations.

A) A political economy of sectarianism

Post-culturalist studies have been deconstructing the postulates on which essentialising readings of Lebanon as a 'weak country' plagued by sectarian divisions are based ever since the 1990s. These academic accounts aim to show that far from being the product of a supposedly 'essential' Lebanese identity, the hegemony of sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilisation is the result of deliberate strategies implemented by sectarian and political elites seeking to impede the emergence of any semblance of rule of law. The Lebanese political/sectarian system has been commented as:

> 'An ever expanding but holistic complex ensemble, one that operates at the structural, institutional, and individual levels, and aims at entrenching and reproducing sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilisation, while sabotaging challenges to the material underpinnings and ideological hegemony of the sectarian system. To start with, there is a structural relation between sectarianism and the country's political economy. Sectarianism is reproduced by, and plays an instrumental role in sustaining Lebanon's

lopsided and patronage-based rentier postwar pol economy […] the result is a political economy that reproduces sectarian modes of subjectivation at the expense of other forms of affiliation, and perpetuates the sectarian/political elite's clientelist infrastructure of control.' (Salloukh et al. 2015: 174).

Likewise, Rima Majed (2022: 77) uses the term 'sectarian neoliberalism' to define these regime structures feeding on social differentiation, in terms of gendered, ethnicised, racialised, regional and sectarianised divisions. Thus, this regime 'has less to do with sectarian anxieties than way those who monopolised violence cooperated with those who monopolised capital, in order to expropriate private and public property and to snatch privileges and an ever increasing share of society's surplus' (Zbeeb 2022:33).

B) Against the weak state paradigm: a hybrid state and sovereignty

1. *The concept of hybrid sovereignty*

Another key concept used to describe the workings of the Lebanese state is that of 'hybridity'; this framework allows to overcome the limited conception of sovereignty underpinning the weakness paradigm. It sheds light on the fact that public institutions are crucial to the functioning of informal networks in the Lebanese society, showing that 'state and non-state actors mutually constitute and feed on one another in order to operate' (Mouawad & Bauman 2017: 70) and how hybrid actors engage in state-like practices of power such as security or foreign policy. Hybridity challenges the assumption of fixed boundaries between state and non-state actors, as well as fluidity between public and private sectors (Leenders 2017), and 'dissolves' the state into wider and plural strands of power. Lebanon is conceived of as 'a constellation of hybrid sovereignties' (Fregonese 2012: 659; see also Stel 2020; Hazbun 2016; Hourani 2013; Hermez 2015). In particular, political parties have been described as 'twilight institutions' that simultaneously play outside statist structures but also govern through these structures to serve the interests of sectarian elites in an ambiguous process of being and

opposing the state (Stel 2020).[38] The matter at hand, then, is not to define the state but rather to explore the empirical manifestations of the state system's inherently 'elusive, porous, and mobile' interfaces with other forms of political authority: rather than being defined by its 'weakness' or physical absence, the Lebanese state is characterised by its elusiveness (Stel 2020). Leenders (2017: 120) argues that institutional informality, liminality and exceptionalism are built into the Lebanese state system as a result of fundamental hybridity:

> 'This omnipresence of the state system and idea in Lebanon indicates that what defines the Lebanese state is not weakness, but rather hybridity. It is not the absence of stateness, but the elusiveness of what the state is and the unpredictability of its institutional manifestations and operations that determines governance in Lebanon.'

2. *Towards a new conception of border sovereignty: a hybrid 'security assemblage'*

The paradigm of hybrid sovereignties proves useful to analyse the border between Lebanon and Syria. Indeed, this borderland is marked by blurred sovereignties, authorities, material and symbolic capital and identities as well as transborder conflicts (Leenders 2017: 78; Picard 2016: 341); and the population has privileged family and local belongings and affinities (Chatty, Mansour & Yassin 2013). Elizabeth Picard (2016) emphasises that classical analyses are blind to transborder dynamics and to the nature of the relationship between Lebanon and Syria because they are 'lost' between the Westphalian principle of separation between states and the blurred reality of the field. Therefore, pre-established ideas of border and sovereignties do not enable to grasp the complexities of this borderland. In reality, sovereignty is not a dichotomous variable, but an 'intersubjective property' (Giddens 1985: 263, cited in Picard 2016: 13). Picard 2016 (*ibid*.: 358) has pointed to the limits presented by the classical interpretation which sees in the Sykes-Picot agreement a failed attempt to transplant the model of the nation-state in the Near-East, establishes a defective link between citizenship and the state, and asserts that sovereignty is unachieved; instead of apprehending the porosity of these borders as inherently symptomatic of the 'weakness' of the state, Picard invites to 'a broader understanding of domestic agency [that] successfully rectify the 'weak' state or deficit perspectives' and to

---

[38] For instance, Hezbollah is a party, armed resistance movement, and a provider of social services and infrastructures while the Lebanese Phalangists and the Future Movement's business networks are integrated into state structures.

'challenge the exclusive legitimate authority of the political power and the formation of a hierarchised political community'. This falls in line with Tholens (2017) and Mouawad (2020)'s work inviting to grasp these borderlands through the prism of 'hybrid sovereignties' and local belongings. Thus, Picard (2016 : 21) 'question the theory of the opposition between Syria as a strong state and Lebanon as a weak state ; and suggest that the transborder system developed during the Lebanese war is the product of potent intersubjectivities'.

To approach the complex web of state and non-state actors in charge of managing the Lebanon-Syria border and the maritime border with Cyprus, I will draw on the concept of 'global security assemblage', which provides a lens to analyse how a 'range of different security agents and normativities interact, cooperate and compete, to produce new institutions, practices and forms of security governance' with overlapping power and sovereignties (Abrahamsen & Williams 2009; cited in Tholens 2017). Indeed, 'global-local assemblage' in which the global enters into the local in ways that defy conceptions of sovereign power are increasingly at the forefront of research on post-national practices (Sassen 2008; Abrahamsen & Williams 2009). In Lebanon, as I will show in the chapter on border management, different entities are responsible for border management and migration, with little to no coordination between them (cf. chapter three). Indeed, apart from state actors – the General Security, the Customs, the International Security Forces and the Army – a number of non-state actors have played a political and security role in these 'soft borders' subject to political leaderships' competition. They include clans and tribes, religious figures, patronage networks, powerful families and Islamist groups, in areas where 'tribal links and cross-border exchanges have rendered non-state governance models resilient and durable' (Picard 2016: 50). The most prominent non-state actor is Hezbollah: its political and military control and its involvement in Syria have contributed to its hegemony in these transborder zones (Mouawad 2018 & 2010), where it organises the bulk of cross-border movements and smuggling due to its presence on both sides of the border. Furthermore, in some locations of Akkar and Hermel-Baalbeck such as Wadi Khaled or Bar Elias, the informal sector amounts to 99% of the economy.

C) A neo-patrimonial state

Finally, recent works have characterised the Lebanese state as 'neo-patrimonial' (Maucourant & Farah 2021; Mouawad & Baumann 2017; Dagher 2022). The theory of the underdeveloped state as neopatrimonial has imposed itself in research since the 1980s – a notion inspired by the research of the economist Max Weber. A 'neo-patrimonial' state is a state governed as a private company, in which power is personalised, based on clientelist networks, and state resources are conceived of as a source of enrichment (Médard 1982; Hibou, Bayart & Ellis 1997; Bayart 1996). It accounts for the capture of the State for private purposes, draining off public resources: 'neo-patrimonialism means the use by holders of public office of their offices for personal benefits' (Dagher 2022: 17-18). Despite possessing modern legal and formal structures, 'the rational legal separation of public and private realms is a mere façade hiding the continuation of premodern patrimonial authority' (Mouawad & Baumann 2017: 68). In countries where reign an almost institutionalised corruption facilitated by the segmentation of society into ethnic or religious communities, neo-patrimonial elites practice financial and economic predation, using public resources for private purpose; this 'economy of looting' slows down economic expansion and production (Dagher 2022: 11-12).[39] It also feeds on deinstitutionalisation (35-41): Dagher (2022) has documented during the displacement of power balance in favor of politicians destroying the legal administration during the 1990s. Within the Lebanese State and the society, itself, an elite is developing which secedes and makes the defence and expansion of its wealth the ultimate goal, resulting in an institutional landscape marked by 'weakly institutionalised polities' and the collapse of administrative capacity (Michael Johnson 1986 & 2001).

> 'Starting from the definition of the Lebanese State as a neo-patrimonial State allows to redefine the Lebanese consociational system in the light of this concept: if Lebanese political leaders manage to avoid the consequences of their disastrous management of the 'public thing' and remain in place, it is because they present themselves as defenders of their respective communities' (Dagher 2022: 21).

---

39 Lebanon's 'predatory patrimonialism' has entailed a complete privatisation of the state, perceptible in the abandonment of central public services such as supply and distribution of fuel, electricity and waste management, the privatisation of the port and Solidere's real estate operations (Dagher 2022: 35).

In line with this analysis, the idea that Lebanon is a democracy is no longer taken for granted, as the 'land of Cedar' presents a striking mix of democratic and autocratic features: though it is arguably a procedural democracy on paper,[40] irregularities during elections and electoral law, it scores less in terms of substantive democracy, as the state does clearly not represent the electorate's preferences; furthermore, Lebanon's governing parties hold a monopoly on power more akin to autocracy, as the inter-party alliance has consolidated electoral control and limited electoral opposition while governing predatorily (Parreira 2020 & 2022).[41] This has been emphasised by the Economist's annual Democracy Index which, in 2022, classified for the first time Lebanon as an 'authoritarian regime'.[42]

This neo-patrimonial approach has contributed to shedding light on the responsibility of the elites in the current multidimensional crisis (Maucourant & Farah 2021) as these elites have purposefully enhanced the accumulation of economic and political resources to their members at the expense of state development. The 2019 mobilisation has shown a widespread awareness from the Lebanese population that the economy was internally monopolised by a few powerful families with privileges that overrule majority interests – as epitomised by the use of the slogan 'all of them means all of them' (*kellon yaani kellon*). In this context, 'the financial meltdown and skyrocketing inflation since 2019 are but the latest symptoms of a political class driven by self-interest that has mobilised sectarian identity and patronage networks to remain in power':

> 'With the support of coercive institutions, especially the state' s security apparatus and alliances between public institutions and private corporations, the cross-sectarian class of political and business elite has so far been successful in undercutting calls for change and preventing any signification sociopolitical reforms' adamant on prolonging and worsening the crisis' (Karam 2022, 89).

In this context, international entities such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund and foreign donors – in spite of their willingness to pursue a 'principled aid' approach – have been

---

40 A procedural democracy entails formal institutions facilitating free and fair elections, while a substantive democracy entails that outcomes represent popular preferences.

41 For a discussion of previous election violations, see the Lebanese Association for Democratic Election's report, 'Observation Mission of 2018 Parliamentary Elections' (2018).

42 Source: Abbas Mahfouz, 'Lebanon classified as 'authoritarian regime' for first time in Economist Intelligence Unit's annual Democracy Index,' L'Orient Today, February 22, 2022, available at: https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1291471/lebanon-classified-as-authoritarian-regime-for-first-time-in-economic-intelligence-units-annual-democracy-index.html [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

criticised by local actors for being complicit in a structure that sustains the grip on power of the sectarian elites. In this view, international aid institutions would have contributed to the continuity and durability of the Lebanese state and its neo-patrimonial and clientelist governance mode, and international financial assistance led to the strengthening and anchoring of the political system.[43] In addition, Dagher (2022) & Ghaziri (2010, cited in Dagher 2022: 68-71) have documented how international institutions such as the UNDP or the World Bank have contributed in the 'collapsing of administrative capacity' that is crucial to the workings of the neo-patrimonial state. Ghaziri has shown the experience of the World Bank in administrative reform, with two periods in the 1980s and in the 1990s: the World Bank has then worked to reduce the effectives of public administration and to reduce salaries of people working there as part of structural adjustment programs established by the IMF.[44]For these reasons, the idea that international institutions aims to preserve the status quo (i.e. the sectarian-based political system despite political stalemates) is widespread:

> 'Many regional and global powers still guard the status quo in Lebanon against revolutionary movements and alternative groups that have tried to reform or overhaul the sectarian-based political system […] for different policy considerations, reign powers could bolster the status quo due to how they perceive political vacuums and the inability to find suitable alternatives to safeguard their interests' (Karam 2022: 89-90).

The year 2020 created a pivotal moment for the international aid system and for the Western principles of neutrality and non-intervention, as the Beirut blast and the current crisis have faced foreign donors and agencies with an unrivalled situation: a crisis caused by criminal neglect and a rotten system built and maintained by the country's political elite. The Beirut port explosion led to limited changes in the rhetoric of some Western donors, who supported civil society organisations (CSO)'s claim that aid spent in response to the port blast should not fall under the control of the Government of Lebanon (GoL). Further, the World Bank has labelled the crisis 'a deliberate depression', marking a shift towards acknowledging the responsibility of the authorities in this crisis.[45] However, three years after the beginning of the crisis, foreign

---

43 Indeed, loans given during conferences and donations escape preliminary inspection by the Court of Audit.
44 Ghaziri studied the formation of the Ministry of State for Administrative development, a parallel administration comprising UNDP affiliated international and local experts and showed how both have benefitted from the marginalisation of the public administration.
45 Source: The World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor, 'The Great Denial', Fall 2021. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36862

powers and international institutions have continued to place their trust in the political class, indicating that the current political system is still being legitimised by the international community.

IV. The Lebanese state's responses to Syrian arrivals: strategic thinking and political repertoire

The last aspect of the context underlying the research I want to emphasise before delving into my findings is the response of the Government of Lebanon (GOL) to Syrian refugee arrivals. First assessed as an absence of response, an attitude of passivity perceived as a 'policy of no-policy', the literature has shown that their responses have actually expressed the political repertoire, features and rentier behaviour of the Lebanese authorities, reflecting a strategic approach rather than a lack of capacity.

A) From a 'policy of no-policy' to the formalisation of informality

1. *A policy of no-policy (Mufti, 2014)*

Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention on the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol and does not have any national laws to regulate the presence of refugees. Thus, refugees were not considered as refugees but as 'displaced persons', 'guests' or 'de facto refugees' (Janmyr 2016; Mourad 2017), and Syrian refugees were dealt with according to the 1962 law on entry and stay of foreigners. In 2012, the government formed an Interministerial Committee and a High Relief Commission with the relevant ministries. Nonetheless, Lebanese authorities initially maintained an 'open door' policy, which allowed a significant number of Syrian arrivals. They retained the existing open border policy between Lebanon and Syria, implemented through bilateral agreements since the 1990s, under which Syrians could freely travel to and work in Lebanon. Similarly, the 'non-encampment policy', whereby the Lebanese government has consistently opposed the establishment of formal refugee camps run by the UNHCR, illustrates a rather passive approach; officially, it aimed to prevent long-term

settlement as they happened with Palestinian refugees (Carpi, Younes & Abi Yaghi 2016: 11); though unofficial camps were established in the North and the Beqaa, most of the refugees were scattered in informal settings, in rural as well as urban areas (Fawaz 2017; Doraï & Dahdah 2021). In addition, part of the response has been delegated to local administrations.[46]Syrians have been working in Lebanon long before the eruption of the Syrian conflict, and 'it is estimated that two years after [its] outbreak [...], the Syrian workforce in Lebanon increased between 30% and 50% [as compared to before the war], comprising about 14% of Lebanon's total workforce (Lebanon Support 2016b: 12)'.[47] Although the Lebanese government had adopted the principle of 'preference for nationals', it has announced, generally by yearly decrees, exceptions of fields in which Syrians are allowed to work.

2. *'Formalising informality'*

2014 marked a turning point in the Lebanese government's response when the initially lax approach seemed to be replaced by increased control. In October, the Interministerial Committee presented a 'policy paper on Syrian Refugee Displacement', approved by the government. These 'October policies' included measures to halt the Syrian refugee inflow at the borders, encouraging Syrian nationals to return to Syria, and attempting to formalise and monitor the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to ease the burden on Lebanon's 'economy, infrastructure, and to ensure security' (Lebanon Support 2016a: 9). Inward migration policies became increasingly restrictive (Lebanon Support 2016a), limiting legal routes into Lebanon for refugees, as well as their right to work (2016b), and international protection. To enter Lebanon, new regulations imposed the implementation of eleven restrictive visa categories for Syrian refugees,[48] *de facto* preventing access to Lebanon for most refugees. In addition, Syrian refugees already present in Lebanon could no longer cross-border to avoid the 200 USD status renewal

---

[46] Under the Ministry of Interior, there are provincial governors [*muhafaza*], district governors [*qaemaqam*], and municipalities [*baladiyat*], and the respective administrations as well as *mukhtars* (village or neighbourhood officials responsible for basic personal status documentation). Yet, these local state structures suffer from lack of capacities and resources, see: Harb & Atallah 2015).

[47] The figures are based on the *World Bank* Data on the economic and social impact assessment of the Syrian conflict.

[48] These include tourism, business visit, property owner, tenant, student, travelling to another country, medical visits, appointment with a foreign embassy, pledge of responsibility (sponsorship, including for work), displaced – which fits the best the category of refugee but is given only under exceptional circumstances and excludes those fleeing the conflict in Syria. All visa categories require Syrians to produce elaborate and specified documentation, which they cannot afford and have trouble to obtain, before being allowed entry. Source: UNHCR, 'Entry procedures for Syrians in Lebanon', 2020, available at: https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/uploads/poster/poster_149865898340.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

fee. In January 2015, these measures were followed by increasingly restrictive regulations governing their residency, with the *kafala* system imposed upon Syrian nationals. The legal framework governing their presence shifted from a preferential to a discriminatory regime, making access to the job market, housing and documentation particularly challenging. In May 2015, the Ministerial Cabinet officially requested that the UNHCR stop registering refugees from Syria as of that same month. Precarious social and statutory conditions have prompted some refugees to return to Syria, and has led to a rise in illegal crossings between the two countries. In this context, the government's initial lax approach seemed to have been replaced by increased control and strategic decision-making.

Currently, Syrian migrant workers who are not recorded with the UNHCR are constrained to work in the sectors of agriculture, construction and cleaning. Syrians wishing to work were required to have a 'pledge of responsibility' by a Lebanese sponsor from January 2015, and to obtain a legal status as migrants – denying them UNHCR aid. Lebanon Support's report (2016b) indicates that these policies, meant to formalise Syrians' presence in the labour market, had the opposite effect. 'A lack of legal status', 'restricted access to the labour market' and 'conflicting policies and practices' have 'pushed many Syrians into illegality and informal structures' and resulted in further abuse and exploitation (*ibid*.: 35).[49] In addition, living in camps have forced them into precariousness and 'manufactured vulnerability' (Stel 2021) ±with extortion, threats of eviction and abuse by landlords and the police (Doraï 2016; Yassin & al. 2015; Harb & Atallah 2015).[50]

---

[49] Refer to data from the Ministry of Labour in *Unemployment in Lebanon, findings and recommendations* (2019) by the Lebanese Republic Economic and Social Council.

[50] In 2017, an estimated 74 % of Syrian refugees in Lebanon did not have valid legal residency documents (UNHCR, United Nations Children's Fund and World Food Program, 2017), and 83 % of Syrian children born in Lebanon since 2011 have not been registered (Yassin 2018: 55).

B) A response emblematic of strategic ambiguity and the GoL's political repertoire

Instead of seeing such policies as lack of policy, incompetence or incapacity, recent interpretations have emphasised how they are emblematic of the Lebanese polity. Fakhoury (2017: 682) argues that despite its apparent passivity, the Lebanese state has capitalised on its 'ingrained political repertoire, understood here as the types of interactions, norms, and routines that are inherent to the polity's governance mode'. She shows how Lebanon has negotiated its politics of reception and choice of policy tools amid dysfunctional institutions and political disputes, and posits that 'this process has been structured by the defining dynamics of the country's politics of sectarianism: slack governance, an elite fractured model, and a politics of dependence on external and domestic nonstate actors'. She argues that:

> 'The Lebanese state's response, far from revealing an unusual strategy to an 'exceptional' mass influx, has built on its ingrained political repertoire, understood here as the types of interactions, norms, and routines that are inherent to the polity's governance mode' (2017: 682).

Thus, Lebanon's strategy toward Syrian mass displacement has 'replicated the patterns of its own style of governance conceived through the lens of weak institutionalism, competing political strategies, and informal elite transactions' with policy disputes, elite divisions and institutional vacuum (*ibid*.: 682). This governance mode also involves delegation of refugee assistance and protection functions to international and national humanitarian and development actors. In the end, the elites have derived benefits from the presence of refugees, 'as a pretext to justify the institutional vacuum and in some cases as leverage in Lebanon's international relations' (*ibid*.: 683).

The October policies have been operationalised by a mix of decisions, decrees, decisions and circulars mainly applied by the General Security and with many inconsistencies (Stel 2020; Fakhoury 2017: 687). They were not communicated with transparency to the public, and some were considered illegal by experts (Fakhoury *ibid.*). Most of them were 'highly ambiguous' (Stel 2020), tending to consolidate 'earlier uncertainty'. Overall, this situation has fostered a massive sense of confusion, for refugees and humanitarian actors alike. For instance, residency regulations have been arbitrarily applied by the GSO, in particular the 200 USD fee waiver

(decided by the GoL in February 2017) for renewing residency status, with ultimately very few refugees benefitting from it.[51]

Stel (2020) has shown that 'inconsistencies and 'ignorance' represent a strategy rather than an absence of governance. Thus, she uses the term 'institutional ambiguity' to evoke inaction in the realm of formal political decision-making when it comes to the refugee response. In line with the emerging field of ignorance studies, she argues that in putting their incapacities and ignorance on show, Lebanese authorities reveal their strategic thinking and 'institutional ambiguity'. Such strategic ignorance translates into their determination in not making the refugee population 'legible' (which should be the basis for formulating policies) with lack of census or registration. Likewise, the elusive mandates of the state agencies tasked with governing Syrian refugees in Lebanon is the outcome of political will rather than a lack of capacity. This is particularly obvious when it comes to the Minister of State for Displaced Affairs (MoDP), created in 2017 which, according to Stel (*ibid*.), amounts to 'institutionalising non-performativity': indeed, falling under the Prime Minister's office, the MoSDP does not have enough institutional resources and detain no executive power.[52]

> 'The core thesis of this book is that the endemic informality, liminality, and exceptionalism that characterise Lebanese refugee governance have crucial strategic dimensions. Rather, institutional ambiguity is the result of the interplay between the systemic features of hybrid order and the strategic operation of political authorities within such hybridity. Inaction and arbitrary action in terms of policymaking as well as implementation define Lebanon's engagement with refugees. This behaviour reproduces but also enhances existing unpredictability and uncertainty. Such utilisation and extension of institutional ambiguity at times amounts to a politics of uncertainty that serves to bolster positions of power *vis-à-vis* political competitors, as well as to discipline, exploit, and expel specific populations' (215).

As captured by this quote, the choice from the authorities of governing through institutional ambiguity has three main effects on refugees. First, that of informality: governance is enacted

---

[51] With regard to entry, in the first three years of the crisis, if they entered Lebanon through an official border crossing, all Syrians received an entry coupon free of charge that could be renewed every six months upon payment of a fee of 200 USD. However, this fee, unaffordable for most refugees, was avoided by many Syrians who would return to Syria simply to cross the border again and receive another free entry coupon.

[52] According to Stel (2021), the appointment of a Minister of State for Displaced Affairs by the Prime Minister also served to establish a political counterweight for the Ministry of Social Affairs as they were in competition.

without being acknowledged or regulated by the state; making it irregular, personalised and unpredictable. Second, that of liminality or temporal uncertainty, marked by suspension, undetermindness, and the transitional and temporary nature of governance practices. Third, that of exceptionalism' (drawn from Agamben's idea of 'state of exception', 1998), by marking specific groups or issues as outside normal legal regimes but inside specific surveillance and repression mechanisms. Informality, liminality, and exceptionalism have generated refugee vulnerability.This ambiguity and uncertainty manifest through discretionary governance measures, experienced as unpredictable by both refugees and humanitarian actors, and producing senses of uncertainty, insecurity and confusion. They have increased refugee 'illegality' and new forms of precariousness, hampering their access to livelihoods and protection.

Agnotology studies suggest that the strategic aspects of the inaction and ambiguous action that produce institutional ambiguity can be grasped by exploring these as 'forms of feigned, maintained, and imposed 'not-knowing'. Governance inaction manifests itself in a lack of official acknowledgement, regulation, and enforcement of particular issues. Thus, passivity – usually depicted as apolitical or an indication of neutrality – is seen as a choice, and doing nothing is 'a political activity', a means of control, coercion and discretionary power.

Conclusion:

This first chapter, exclusively based on existing literature, has set the stage and the context underlying the research; I have shown the construction and use of the paradigm of state weakness to describe Lebanon by IO professionals as well as part of the academia, and shed light on recent theories calling into question such paradigm with new concepts to describe the workings of the Lebanese state. In the next chapters, I will highlight the centrality and productivity of the concept of state weakness as an expert category open for empirical scrutiny, rather than a normative and irrefutable principle. I will show that the assumption of 'state failure' or absence in Lebanon is further re-enforced by expert discursive practices, in particular the UNHCR and the ICMPD. Chapters two and three will examine how the depoliticisation of the interventions of international actors strongly lies in the simplistic idea of the Lebanese state as 'weak', 'incapable' and 'absent'. My contention is that these narratives technicise the Lebanese state by framing its policy choices either as an absence of choice, or as a product of

incompetence. In addition, this view relies on an essentialised interpretation of sectarian identities that presents Lebanese policies as an organic feature rather than an outcome of conscious political choices, reducing Lebanese affairs to the status of a confrontation between sectarian communities while downplaying the political agency of the Lebanese elites.

Chapter two: Lebanon's refugee regime: security and humanitarian paradigms

Lebanon exemplifies the 'Grand Compromise' that has governed the refugee regime since the 1980s (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012) and is characterised by externalisation of refugee-hosting responsibilities to the global South by the global North in exchange for financial compensation. Under this regime, refugees are concentrated in states bordering their countries of origin, generally for protracted periods of time, in the absence of resettlement slots and local integration prospects. As the chief designator of the 'refugee label' worldwide, the UNHCR has increasingly become a subject of academic interest. A range of studies have documented the expansion of its mandate over time and its relations with state authorities, between autonomy and independence (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012; Barnett & Finnemore 2004).

This chapter describes the nuances of the UNHCR's depoliticisation. As mentioned in the introduction, depoliticisation refers to the tendency of political actors to obscure the political character of political facts and present policymaking as a neutral, necessary and incontestable process in which the option of choosing between different political (and not simply technical) alternatives is (like disagreement and contestation) either limited or denied. It includes 'the set of processes (including varied tactics, strategies and tools) that remove or displace potential for choice, collective agency, and deliberation around a particular political issue' (Fawcett et al. 2017: 5). Beveridge (2017: 592-595) emphasises the importance of defining politics to grasp empirical patterns of depoliticisation: first, political is defined as 'the institution of government'. Second, as a marker of 'choice and contingency' or 'the capacity for agency and deliberation in situations of genuine collective and social choice' (Hay 2007: 77 cited in Beveridge 2017). Third, as the 'apparatus or order and consensus versus 'political' moments of antagonism', a definition that opposes 'radical politics' and the existing political order, resistant to change (Beveridge 2017). Hay (2014) has identified three phases of depoliticisation: 'governmental depoliticisation' or the process of delegation, 'public depoliticisation' or the privatisation of public sectors, and 'private depoliticisation' or the denial of issues. I mentioned Wood & Flinders (2014)'s three 'tactics' of depoliticisation, i.e. governmental, societal and discursive; as well as the distinction between normative depoliticisation, discursive depoliticisation and depoliticisation through expertise (Petiteville 2017a).

Stone (2017: 93) sees in depoliticisation a form of 'governing at remove'. She argues that new 'fuzzy' forms of governance 'obscure the explicitly political nature of decisions', thus making them appear more technocratic, while 'the fragmentation of global policy responsibilities via a proliferation of tools, instruments, 'soft law', standard-setting with sector-specific regulation, and partnerships cultivates disinterest among citizens and communities' (94). She sheds light on four types of depoliticisation: first, 'institutional depoliticisation' involving tactics of distancing and delegation of authority and implementation to other bodies by IOs and governments. Second, 'rule-based depoliticisation' builds explicit rules into decision-making that are as 'neutral and universal as possible'. Third, 'depoliticisation through preference-shaping' and agenda-setting in transnational venues speaks to the establishment of a 'dominant rationality' that erase certain issues from public debate and deploy expertise to entrench certain ways of defining problems. Finally, 'scientisation' (95) sheds light on the increased complexity of most fields of governance and the 'required' input by scientific professionals.

According to Maertens & Louis (2021), depoliticisation is a resilient feature of IOs' actions. They look at depoliticisation 'as a political process' enacted through specific practices, observing how IOs 'enact' depoliticisation and how depoliticisation 'works in practice (*ibid.*: 6):

> 'Moving from the idea that political activities are performed by political elites, [our study] does not consider depoliticisation as enacted solely by diplomats or IO heads but investigates other professionals including intermediate level management. It focuses particularly on IO politics pertaining to exercising power and authority, acknowledging responsibility, managing resources of influence (knowledge, representation, time) and facing debates, confrontation and conflicts over alternative or diverging worldviews and subsequent political decisions' (*ibid.*: 6).

Beveridge (2017: 595) argues that 'one strength of the political theory literature lies in seeing the political as the reassertion of fundamental differences': with the notion of the 'post-political' Mouffe 'capture a democratic condition in which genuine contestation and conflicting claims about the world are perceived to be no longer apparent' (2005, cited in Beveridge: 591) shows how a key component of depoliticisation lies in a 'disavowal of the legitimacy of actors' worldviews'. Thus, depoliticisation makes issues appear as if they belonged to the arena of fate and necessity. The delegation of decision-making to technocratic experts is one empirical

manifestation of this evolution, which epitomises the rise of consensus-oriented and technocratic governance.

This chapter provides an attempt to grasp how to define depoliticisation empirically. In a context that is relatively hostile, depoliticisation is essential to UNHCR interventions because it enables the agency to approach politically charged issues, under the guise of neutrality, from a technical and humanitarian angle. This process is enacted through a series of overlapping practices. As other recent field studies have suggested, in Lebanon, the UNHCR has drawn its authority on the mobilisation of expert knowledge on refugee governance, the hegemony of the language of human rights and humanitarianism, and securitisation practices. In addition, I argue that these mechanisms of depoliticisation promote the image of a perpetual crisis-stricken country in which the state is absent and fragmented, to legitimise foreign interventions. More importantly, the mechanisms in question are influenced by the production and dissemination of coherent narratives regarding mobility and refugee return, narratives that conceal the history of circulation between Lebanon and Syria, thereby suspending a political perspective.

My research shows that these depoliticised mechanisms and narratives function as disciplinary technologies that serve to structure refugee policies, confer coherence on the fragmentation of practices on the ground, and sustain the complex network of relationships necessary for the UNHCR's governance. Examining these processes entails considering the roles of actors at every level, which reveal that Lebanese officials are active participants in the depoliticisation process. The stakes of refugee governance in Lebanon are closely linked to the UNHCR and its efforts to negotiate and naturalise the status of refugees through registration, despite the reluctance of Lebanese authorities. This has been accomplished through the institutionalisation of the category of refugee. However, these policies promote an ahistorical view of relations between Lebanon and Syria. My fieldwork sample incorporates any entity that the UNHCR has cooperated or negotiated with, including NGO partners, donors, and Lebanese officials. I attended closely to the power dynamics between these actors. Rather than portraying the UNHCR as a vehicle for the interests of donors or host states, my work aims to demonstrate that the agency has its own independent rationale and has in fact increased its bargaining power over Lebanese authorities (consistent with the findings of Geha & Talhouk 2018). This brings empirical evidence to the debate on the UNHCR's autonomy and independence from state authorities (as put forth by Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012).

Miriam Ticktin, an anthropologist specialising in humanitarian action and its relationship to migration, has argued that humanitarianism and policing are two sides of the same coin, 'intimately linked, with policing often accompanied by a gesture towards the humane, and toward the ethical, where force is justified in the name of peace and right' (2007: 120). This dualism is omnipresent in UNHCR action.

The first section of this chapter unravels the UNHCR's key historical milestones, its apolitical mandate and its differences with the UNHCR. Second, I show that depoliticisation mechanisms target the Lebanese state by promoting an essentialised and reified vision of Lebanon and its capacity limitations. To legitimise foreign interventions, the UNHCR has established a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, fragmentation, and a country perpetually in crisis. Without regard for political context, these narratives have shaped international actions towards a country designated as a 'land of refuge'. The depoliticisation of the relations between the UNHCR and Lebanon also entails the promotion of a narrative of good cooperation between the international donor community and the host state, smoothing out disagreements.

Third, I unravel the UNHCR's depoliticised logics of action, such as technocratic distancing, neutrality claims and vulnerability politics. In particular, I show how the UNHCR legitimises its action through the promotion of its expertise, depicting itself as an apolitical and neutral organisation, and acting as a 'norm entrepreneur' and a pragmatic manager of the presence of refugees. This depoliticised narrative also operates by drawing an essential demarcation between the inherently technical and the inherently political, despite the evidence of blurred boundaries between expertise and politics.

Then, I show how these logics of action permeate UNHCR policies related to Syrian mobility. I deconstruct the politics surrounding refugee registration and de-registration to illustrate the securitisation logic inherent to the UNHCR's work. I also unpack the deployment of technologies of governance in resettlement programmes designed for Syrian refugees, resulting in the UNHCR becoming part of the border apparatus. Resettlement is a 'borderwork' which reconfigures mobility access around hierarchies of vulnerability; if the 'deservingness' of resettlement is constructed in a depoliticised manner – through labelling and quantification of

vulnerabilities – it is an authoritarian process in regard to those it seeks to govern. Peer policing and the disciplining of sexual and gender identities construct 'deserving' refugees through the cultural and gendered performance of persecution in home countries. Finally, I posit that the UNHCR has adopted a depoliticised approach to return. This depoliticisation is embedded in a sedentary order which essentialises the link between Syrians and their nation states, is facilitated by the fragmentation of return initiatives, and goes through the assertion of the 'voluntary' character of returns.

I.   The UNHCR: the cornerstone of the global refugee regime

A) The UNHCR and the 1951 Convention

As it currently exists, the global refugee regime articulated by the UNHCR under the 1951 Convention emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It can be defined as the 'principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures that influence the treatment of refugees by actors within the international system, including states, international organisations, and NGOs' (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012: 125). The UNHCR was established in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly as a temporary agency tasked with protecting refugees displaced by World War II and subsequently by the aftermath of the Cold War. The 1951 Convention Related to the Status of Refugees defines who qualifies for refugee status: Article 1A (20) specifies that the term applies to any person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'. The Convention describes the rights to which refugees are entitled, principally the right of 'non-refoulement'. Article 1F lists who can be excluded from the definition. The Convention and its Statute assign the UNHCR the supervisory responsibility for its implementation, along with two core mandates: working with states to ensure refugees access to protection and finding durable solutions to their situation — i.e. repatriation to their country of origin, integration in the host country, or resettlement in third countries.

The Statute specifies that 'the work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character' (UNHCR 1950). Scholars have demonstrated that this is a crucial aspect of the UNHCR's identity and legal legitimacy: indeed, it was part of the High Commissioners' efforts to portray the UNHCR as an apolitical and humanitarian organisation that gave the Office considerable leverage in negotiations with governments (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012; Loescher 2001). Whether in negotiations with the UN General Assembly or in field operations, the UNHCR's role depends on international norms of sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic affairs. In practice, this ensures that the UNHCR is not responsible for the quality of asylum and protection norms in host countries. Overall, the UNHCR's Statute was informed by Western interests and in particular those of the United States. Indeed, by limiting the authority of the UNHCR, Western countries have prevented the agency from jeopardising their national sovereignty while bestowing upon themselves the opportunity to use it to serve ideological purposes by stigmatising Communist regimes as persecutors.

In the following decades, the UNHCR expanded the scope of its activities thanks to authorisations given by the UN General Assembly: the 'good office practice' involved the Assembly granting the UNHCR the authority to raise funds or to initiate relief programmes outside the scope of its original mandate. Thanks to this practice and to the 1967 Protocol to the Refugee Convention, the UNHCR's mandate has been geographically extended to cover virtually the entire world and all 'people on the move' – half of whom are considered refugees *stricto sensu*. This evolution has taken place progressively. During the Cold War, the UNHCR approached the refugee problem 'in a manner which can be characterised as reactive, exile-oriented, and refugee-centric' (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012: 19): in addition to its European operations, it increasingly focused its efforts on assisting refugees who fled to camps in neighbouring countries in the Global South. It was then faced with the challenging task to deal with the political interests of both Western colonial powers and the newly independent states progressively dominating the UN General Assembly.

During the 1980s, the topic of migration became increasingly politicised, in a context of massive refugee and migrant movements and increasing restrictions by Western states on asylum policies. An increasing number of asylum-seekers travelling from the global South to Europe and North America were bypassing official refugee-processing channels; these movements of people were labelled as illegal by Western governments. In this context, the UNHCR lost authority and donor support. At the end of the decade, Western states began to

externalise policies designed to contain refugees in their region of origin, severely limiting the quality and quantity of asylum (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012). Akoka (2020: 18-22) describes this paradigm shift as a transition from a 'refugee regime' informed by diplomatic policies to an 'asylum-seeker' regime shaped instead by migratory policies and the objective to reduce the number of asylum seekers in Northern states continuously. The expansion of migratory regulations put an end to the porosity between asylum procedures and immigration and the categories of migrants and refugees. Induced by the growing perception of migrants as 'burdens' or 'threats', the global rise in refugee numbers and decline in asylum applications in the North has obliged the UNHCR to address situations over which it has little control, prompting an 'identity crisis' within the organisation (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012: 105). Despite its humanitarian mandate, the agency has increasingly embraced the 'asylum-migration nexus' and promoted a link between refugees and security issues, effectively fulfilling the 'political function of humanitarianism' for Northern countries (Fassin 2011).

As a result, the UNHCR's focus has shifted from legal protection and durable solutions to providing material assistance such as humanitarian relief, camp management, and protection monitoring, thereby facing competition from NGOs for scarce donor resources. The late 1980s and the 1990s saw the agency assume a wider role in responses to new intra-state conflicts, providing humanitarian relief and IDP protection. The UNHCR engaged in repatriation operations, sometimes at the cost of human rights violations – for instance, with the promotion of the repatriation of Tamils to Sri Lanka and of Salvadorans to El Salvador with high risks for returnees, as well as with forced return of Rohingyas to Myanmar (Burma) from Bangladesh in 1994, and the expulsion of Rwandans from Tanzania in 1996.

Overall, the UNHCR has espoused the Western securitised perception of refugees, at a time when, in forced displacement crises in the Great Lakes region, West Africa, the former Yugoslavia, the Balkans, East Timor, Iraq or Haiti, refugees were perceived as a threat to international security; thus, Western states expanded their operations to Internally Displaced Persons. The UNHCR has therefore increased its work in countries of origin in order to reduce cross-border flows, and refocused its activities on temporary protection and cross-border assistance.

By 2004, some two-thirds of the world's refugees were trapped in protracted situations, with the average duration of a refugee situation having almost doubled from nine years in 1993 to

seventeen years in 2004 (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012: 62). In the late 2000s, the UNHCR launched the Global Conventions and Convention Plus initiatives to seek a convergence between protection needs and state interests; a declaration was adopted reasserting the importance of the 1951 Convention and the role of the UNHCR. The Agenda for Protection was endorsed by the General Assembly in 2002 to strengthen the international protection regime, though its impact has remained limited due to its non-binding character. Attempts to develop new interstate agreements, enhance prospects for solutions for refugees in regions of origin and increase burden-sharing have remained ineffective. At the same time, the UNHCR has faced growing criticism for being too aligned with the interests of a small number of European states at the expense of Southern states.

The advent of the 'war on terror' following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 exacerbated states' security concerns and ushered in a new era of restrictions against refugees and migrants and further challenges for the UNHCR and its mandate. The UNHCR changed the term used to describe its beneficiaries from 'refugees and asylum seekers' to 'persons of concern to the UNHCR' and then from 2005 onwards as 'people on the move'. Under the mandate of António Guterres (between 2005 and 2015), the UNHCR has greatly expanded the categories of people falling under its concern: in addition to refugees, returnees and stateless persons, the UNHCR's population of concern also includes Internally Displaced Persons, 'vulnerable migrants' and victims of natural disasters. During the 2000s, the UNHCR had to deal with new emergencies leading to protracted refugee situations such as the situation along the Chad/Darfur border and the invasion of Iraq by the United States, before the Syrian crisis became the world's largest displacement crisis.

In addition, Guterres's mandate has brought about organisational changes, with a more consultative and less hierarchical approach to decision-making, aiming to increase the perceived legitimacy of new initiatives and areas of work. This 'modernisation' has also entailed further decentralisation so that more decisions would be taken at the field level. As the *de facto* central coordinator of humanitarian assistance following the 2005 World Summit, the agency has assumed leadership of the 'global protection cluster'. The UNHCR is now among the most prominent players in the international humanitarian system, with an annual budget of nine billion dollars and almost 18,000 staff members worldwide (85% in the field), with most of its operations in the Global South (UNHCR 2022a).

B) The UNRWA

One important milestone to understand the scope of UNHCR interventions in Lebanon is the creation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in December 1949, established by UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) following the creation of the state of Israel and the subsequent expulsion of 900.000 Palestinians seeking refuge in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (Akram 2014). Indeed, to preserve the option of 'repatriation' back to Palestine as promoted by the UN (UN General Assembly resolution 194), Palestinian refugees have been excluded from the universal regime of legal protection based on the 1951 Geneva Convention and the UNHCR's operational mandate. The UNHCR and the UNRWA present stark differences in their missions. Unlike the UNHCR, the UNRWA does not have a Statute or an Executive Committee, thus lacking legal authority for many of its activities. Its mandate is limited, first geographically: it covers exclusively Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. It is also restricted in terms of population to Palestinians displaced in 1948 and 1967 and their descendants, and who are considered 'vulnerable […] according to relief or protection criteria' (UNRWA 1949) – thus, beneficiaries can be cut from aid based on changed priorities of vulnerabilities. Another limitation is the UNRWA's 'long-term' temporary status: its three-years mandate is being continuously renewed as making the agency's mandate permanent would suggest that the Palestinian refugee crisis will never be resolved. In addition, the UNRWA relies entirely on voluntary donations – while the UNHCR receives part of its funding from the UN budget. These characteristics have induced a form of temporariness in planning (Akram 2014).

As mentioned in chapter one, Palestinian refugees have faced discrimination with denial of access to the job market, education and health systems. Another cornerstone difference between the UNRWA and the UNHCR, is that the UNRWA is not mandated to provide legal protection of refugee rights, which has led to a strong protection gap between the two agencies. Indeed, the UNHCR's Statute includes responsibility for providing protection, promoting repatriation as a durable solution, and/or local integration and resettlement. Thus, the UNRWA's role is limited to economic integration, social services, assistance in the twelve official refugee camps, educational programmes, maintenance and development of basic infrastructure to schools, etc. (Doraï 2010 & 2016).

C) The UNHCR's system of meaning and depoliticised approach

UNHCR interventions draw on certain values and assumptions presented as universal and that have been called into questions by recent scholarly literature. First, the distinction between refugees and migrants is a cornerstone of the refugee system. The refugee category is particularly vulnerable to essentialism because it is naturalised by international law, a powerful instrument of reification that contributes to the illusion of universality. UNHCR's texts promote an 'essentialised' view of refugees, framing their status as an intrinsic 'quality':

> 'A person is a refugee within the meaning of the 1951 Convention as soon as he fulfils the criteria contained in the definition. This would necessarily occur prior to the time at which his refugee status is formally determined. Recognition of his refugee status does not therefore make him a refugee but declares him to be one. He does not become a refugee because of recognition but is recognised because he is a refugee' (UNHCR 1979).

In point of fact, a refugee is a person to whom the qualitative has been applied. In accordance with the 'labelling theory' (Becker 1963), scholars such as Akoka (2020) have demonstrated that this theoretical 'quality of refugee' signifies little more than an administrative category. These labels are emblematic of the 'institutionalisation through public action of social and cognitive classifications constitutive of visions of the social world' (*ibid*.). As a product of historically contingent decisions, the refugee category reflects criteria beyond the topic of persecution. The opposition between political refugees and economic migrants has imposed itself as an obvious reality, as well as the hierarchy that legitimises the hosting of refugees at the expense of migrants. Akoka shows that these definitions reveal more about the states applying them that the individuals they are supposed to refer to, as the 'refugee' label keeps evolving according to power relationships and political priorities. By studying the Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA), a French government office responsible for processing applications for refugee status, Akoka shows that while during the Cold War, the subjugation of asylum to diplomatic and economic policies has favoured a high acceptance rate, its instrumentalisation by migratory policies has led to a high rejection rate.

In addition, the UNHCR's protection discourse and the migration management paradigm are both grounded in 'methodological nationalism', i.e. a system of representation that considers the nation-state to be a natural social and political entity of the modern world (Wimmer & Schiller 2002; Malkki 1995). This system normalises the 'isomorphism' between the polities of citizens and the territories of their state of citizenship (Scalettaris 2013: 14). Scalettaris designates this worldview as the 'international episteme', which focalises the state as the universal (and sole) mode of political organisation and the highest competent authority. She asserts that:

'Viewing international refugee law as an absolute value and reproducing the categories of refugee policy leads the researcher to adhere to a particular universalism, naturalise the UNHCR worldview, and ultimately participate in, or legitimise, the device of locating and delegitimising migration through which international refugee government takes shape' (2013: 42).

She reflexively describes the challenges of breaking from the mode of thinking ingrained in her as an employee of the UNHCR. The agency demonstrates a 'sedentary bias' (Bakewell 2002) that frames mobility as an abnormality or the symptom of a problem. The UNHCR has always favoured a sedentary lifestyle for refugees, thereby institutionalising the link between refugees and their state of origin. The agency's rationale regards mobility as a deviance and the state as a necessary instrument of regulation and legitimisation. This 'sedentary' line of thinking is a significant limitation, as it is specifically through mobility and the mobilisation of transnational resources and networks refugees seek economic security. Paradoxically, this state-centred vision reinforces the sedentary order at the root of the issues the UNHCR seeks to resolve, rendering them insoluble. Indeed, the protection mission of the UNHCR and its respect of national sovereignty has prompted the agency to reproduce the 'national order' that is partly the cause of the problem it aims to resolve. The UNHCR assists migrants and refugees while being embedded within the sedentary order that constrains their mobility. The interstate nature of the UNHCR legitimises its 'moral' and universalist authority; however, it also significantly limits the scope of its actions.

A recent body of literature has attributed to the structural tension between the UNHCR's mandate to promote asylum rights and its dependence on state funding, what are seen as the agency's failures. These so-called failures include the following: the UNHCR's inability to

ensure refugee protection, to address protracted refugee situations, to ensure timely access to long-term solutions, to guarantee greater political commitments by states and to sanction states who do not meet their obligations under international refugee law. A number of scholars, primarily anthropologists, have directed criticism at the hegemony and power leveraging of the UNHCR over human mobility, the alleged universality of its mandate, and its disciplinary authority (Scalettaris 2013; Fresia 2014 & 2018). They show that the UNHCR exerts a form of disciplinary surveillance regulating relations between populations and territories according to the principle of the 'national order' which hinders human mobility. Indeed, the UNHCR has encouraged states to introduce more efficient controls at the border. Scalettaris (2013) and Fresia (2009) have also pointed to the UNHCR's authority over its employees who are constantly moving from duty stations to duty stations, having limited and codified relations with local contexts: the organisation thus acts as a powerful disciplinary 'dispositive' which imposes its understanding of the world. Scalettaris calls 'international cosmopolitism' the way these employees feel 'global' even though this cosmopolitism is deeply rooted in the national order (2013: 199).

More recently, scholars have attempted to use ethnographic methods to study the operating modes of this 'institutional fortress' from the inside, with a focus on its modalities of action (Sandvik 2011; Scalettaris 2013; Fresia 2018). Their works have pointed to the relationship between UNHCR practices in the field of refugee protection and recent political rationales underlying migration management. These studies describe the UNHCR as a body that has 'increasingly affirmed its authority by depoliticising, moralising, and making technical issues that are inherently political' (Fresia 2012: 52), the technical and moral authority of UNHCR experts imposing itself at the expense of national and political agendas. The UNHCR's authority relies on technical expertise; yet its knowledge production is deeply political (Scalettaris 2013) as it influences the way the international regime of refugee protection is enacted in practice:

> 'The knowledge produced by the UNHCR is inevitably related both to the organisation's means and to its policy objectives. Therefore, this knowledge is necessarily embedded in a circle of self-legitimisation: it proposes readings and analysis that arrange the reality in order to prepare it to receive the interventions envisioned by the UNHCR and that it can implement. This intervention thus appears as the solution to the identified issue' (Scalettaris 2013: 316).

Knowledge production has indeed been a focus of studies on depoliticisation, along with technicisation and the scientification of politics as a way to examine how IOs enact depoliticisation (Barnett & Finnemore 2004; Sending 2015; Louis & Maertens 2021).

State delegation of protection activities to the UNHCR undoubtedly falls within the process of 'agencification' (or 'the delegation of regulatory tasks to independent agencies [...] as the consequence of a search for impartiality and expertise', Fawcett et al. 2017: 134), culminating in forms of technocratic distancing. The moral authority vested in the UNHCR is one of its greatest resources. The agency has been fiercely criticised in Lebanon, however. Its relations with state officials have been strained, and several high-ranking individuals have accused the organisation of encroachment on Lebanon's sovereignty and of a 'hidden agenda' of keeping refugees in Lebanon by deterring them from returning to Syria. Given this emphasis on UN involvement, the UNHCR has arguably served as a 'scapegoat' for the rest of the international donor community (cf. chapter four on the repoliticisation of the UNHCR's actions).

II. The depoliticisation of the UNHCR's interventions with a state perceived as 'weak' and 'absent'

In this section, I posit that depoliticisation mechanisms target the Lebanese state by promoting an essentialised and reified vision of Lebanon and its capacity limitations. To legitimise foreign interventions, the UNHCR has established a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, fragmentation, and a country perpetually in crisis. Without regard for political context, these narratives have shaped international actions towards a country designated as a 'land of refuge'.

A) The UN refugee regime: between 'responsibility shift' and shadow legal regime

Prior to the Syrian arrivals, the UNHCR played a critical role in refugee protection in Lebanon after 2003, to assist Iraqi refugees. The agency has then been characterised as fulfilling the role of a 'surrogate state' by designing and implementing procedures for the legal recognition of refugees and controlling access to economic and social assistance (Kagan 2011). The origins of this pattern of surrogacy can be traced to Africa in the 1960s (Slaughter & Crisp 2009). Two decades later, this 'state-to-UN responsibility shift' became common in Arab states such as Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, where host governments have to varying extents outsourced the responsibility of caring for refugee populations to the UNRWA and the UNHCR. The Palestinian example has constituted a paradigm of this surrogacy model in which national narratives resist *tawtin* (local integration) and the UNRWA has taken on responsibilities similar to those of a government in the health, education, and social welfare sectors. Jordan, Syria, and Egypt have generally been more involved in refugee assistance than Lebanon, where state officials remain disengaged from such policies. By performing a 'state substitution role' without the capacity to fully substitute a host government, agencies have contributed to a general delocalisation of sovereign power – although their reach remains limited by local jurisdiction. This dynamic has facilitated decreased involvement by state officials, aside from the protecting negative liberties and refraining from deporting refugees. The state-centred ethos of refugee law regards such situations as a 'legal anomaly' – 'the systems that exist on the ground for refugees in the ME are essentially off the radar screen of conventional thinking in the field of international law because they rely on shifting responsibility from the state to the UN' (Kagan 2011: 9).

UNHCR opened its office in Lebanon in 1964. During the ensuing decades, the agency operated under a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' with state authorities that allowed the registration and protection of refugees from Sudan, Eretria, and Iraq. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, Lebanese authorities, disregarding Refugee Status Determination (RSD) decisions, detained and deported hundreds of Iraqi and Sudanese asylum seekers and refugees. Extensive negotiations between UNHCR and state officials resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2003 as the number of Iraqi refugees seeking asylum in Lebanon skyrocketed following the American invasion. UNHCR had opened suboffices in North Lebanon (Tripoli),

the Beqaa (Zahlé), and the South (Tyre) two years earlier. The MoU stated that Lebanon is 'not an asylum country [but a] transit country' (UNHCR 2003b). As discussed in the first chapter, the state of Lebanon does not recognise the category of refugees. The definition outlined in the document diverges from the 1951 Convention's definition: 'the term 'asylum-seeker' shall mean [a] person seeking asylum in a country other than Lebanon'. Most importantly, the MoU delegated responsibility for registration (including for asylum seekers who entered the country illegally), protection from deportation and refoulement, and 'social and economic concerns' to UNHCR. The agency was not legally mandated to provide legal status, however. Finally, the MoU offered provisions for access to safety, non-refoulement, and long-term solutions including resettlement.

Legal scholars have underscored the structural flaws of this MoU (Janmyr 2017; Janmyr & Mourad 2017), emphasising that both parties lacked the capacity to deliver on their substantive commitments. The UNHCR agreed to seek lasting solutions for refugees elsewhere, yet the agency could not in practice force states to increase their resettlement quotas – ultimately, fewer than 5% of Iraqi refugees found asylum in third countries. The MoU established a twelve-month limit on refugee residency, precipitating the threat of detention and deportation for illegal residents. Although the agreement clarified that the government was responsible for addressing security issues involving refugees, it did not include provisions for regulating detention, nor did it guarantee the UNHCR access to detained refugees. The UNHCR adopted a pragmatic approach to compensate for these limitations. The agency managed to ensure a degree of safety from refoulement by registering refugees and expanding the definition of protection to encompass economic and social dimensions. To avoid illegal status and the risk of indefinite detention, Iraqi refugees were required to obtain a tourist visa upon entering Lebanon. The UNHCR then acted as a third-party 'sponsor' for the refugees by paying fines through their partners for their release and aiding them in obtaining work and resident permits within three months. Between 2003 and 2006, the UNHCR also implemented a Temporary Protection Regime that included a number of mechanisms for recognition and in 2007, the organisation declared all Iraqi refugees from Southern and Central areas of the country prima facie refugees. However, none of these practices were formally acknowledged by Lebanese authorities. Although the UNHCR appears to have filled a leadership vacuum in the refugee response, 'the legal mandate for its work in Lebanon has largely been left undefined' (Janmyr 2017: 411). As such, the UNHCR has 'arguably become increasingly exposed to governmental interferences in its operations' (Jagarnathsingh 2016: 22). According to Kagan (2011: 24), 'responsibility

shift exists because it addresses the political interests of states, both in terms of material and symbolic benefits'. This idea challenges the notion that the UNHCR's primary motive is the pursuit of donor money and institutional power, a view that overlooks the host governments' decisive role in shaping refugee policy. Kagan (*ibid*.: 7) suggested that both the UN and the host state may have supported this shift and consequently, that the UNHCR has often been trapped into performing quasi-governmental functions. Kagan evoked the symbolic role of third-party sponsors provided by the UNHCR, which 'accommodated the practical reality of long-term exile without surrendering in principle the insistence on the return as the only acceptable permanent solution' and 'offers symbolic political benefits to host states, in addition to its utility in facilitating the shifting of resource burdens' (11-12).

When the Syrian influx began, UNHCR sought to ensure that Lebanon behaved in accordance with the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol by negotiating a 'protection space' for refugees despite the ambiguous legal framework. Because Lebanon was not party to the Convention, the agency has often functioned in a 'legal limbo' regarding refugee protection (Janmyr, 2017). According to my UNHCR informants, on a practical level this has caused unpredictability and arbitrariness. For instance, a UNHCR representative stated that:

> 'What being party to the Convention would entail is having either accepted it as national, applicable law, or having a national asylum law that reflects it; it gives you predictability of the standards which you should apply. It gives a sense of security and allows you to plan things on a long-term basis.'[53]

Another representative commented:

> 'If you are a party to the Convention, there are obligations around access to protection or rights for refugees. What is challenging in countries such as Lebanon, where you do not have an asylum legislation, is that the framework is vague and there are sometimes risks of arbitrariness.'[54]

---

[53] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.
[54] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018.

Lebanon offers a striking counter-example of most international interventions in UNHCR countries of operation, as many of which have sought to strengthen state asylum bureaucracy and assistance capacities: in Lebanon, the agency has assumed sovereign responsibilities by establishing a 'protection space' for refugees, particularly concerning registration, vulnerability assessment, and social welfare systems such as cash-transfer programmes and health and educational projects. International funding notably circumvents local government, which is highly unusual in the humanitarian landscape. The reason for this policy decision has been interpreted by the donor community as a lack of local governance structures (and pervasive corruption in particular). As a result, 85% of foreign money – primarily sent by European countries and the United States – transits through the UNHCR, the WFP, and the UNICEF. UN agencies and IOs such as the UNFPI, the OCHA, the ICRC, the GIZ, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the DRC, and Gulf Red Crescent Societies have also played a significant role in the refugee response. The Lebanese Red Cross has been the primary national emergency respondent. As numerous decisions were made on a local level, humanitarian actors first engaged in a dialogue with municipalities and mukhtar (heads of districts). In an attempt 'to nationalise [its] partnerships on the ground' in line with the 2016 localisation agenda, the UNHCR has implemented half of its projects through local organisations. The ecosystem of the Syrian response thus bypasses the state almost entirely. This 'responsibility shift' hinges on the idea that refugee policies are a low priority on the political agenda of Lebanon. Although this assumption is inaccurate (see first chapter), it nevertheless remains a central feature of UNHCR's legitimisation discourse and depoliticisation mechanisms.

B) Framing Lebanon: The articulation of technical and political registers

Depoliticisation mechanisms, which represent Lebanon as an absent state afflicted by fragmentation and bad governance, draw upon 'development buzzwords' (Koechlin 2013) such as 'corruption' and 'capacity-building'. In my view, these terms are 'political concepts' (*ibid.*: 134) produced by development and humanitarian discourse that shape social realities by justifying material interventions. My findings illustrate that these mechanisms technicise the Lebanese state by framing its policy choices either as an absence of choice, or as a product of incompetence, downplaying the political agency of the state and obscuring the structural motives behind this alleged 'policy of no-policy'. This concept of a policy vacuum is essential

to the legitimisation of UNHCR activities in Lebanon. My interviewees often insisted on the 'absence' of state, as captured by the following quotes from representatives of the international community:

> 'The first thing you need to know about Lebanon, is that there is no state here. There is no national policy, the state is completely absent. Everything in cannibalised by sectarian factions. There is no notion of the common good. So the UN and the EU or whatever, they had to come up with their own idea for aid distribution. They have to do everything, to decide on everything. They take the role of the state.'[55][56]

The international donor community was particularly struck by the lack of state bureaucracy dedicated to refugee issues, as illustrated by the comments of an ECHO officer:

> 'Here, there is absolutely no one who is in charge of the refugees. There is no institution, no law, no legal framework, nothing at all. It's crazy. Everywhere, normally, you have an institutional perspective, even [in] countries such as Mexico [or] Sudan, you have a refugee commission. Normally, it is under the Presidency. Here, nothing. So we have to operate in a completely blank policy space. This is very rare for the UNHCR when it reaches this level.'[57]

They framed the Lebanese state's refusal to integrate their conception of refugees as a product of ignorance:

> 'My opinion is that here, they have a problem with the concept of refugees. They don't know this concept. They are not aware of its meaning, of the concept of international protection. They act as if refugees did not exist. Maybe it's denial, but I think it's ignorance.'[58]

This narrative has been used by the agency, particularly to justify international funding bypassing the state. A representative of the UNHCR Tripoli office told me that:

---

55 Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.
56 Interview with a representative of EEAS, Brussels, February 2020.
57 Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018.
58 Interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, January 2020.

'We really highlight that we do not want any money going through the government and this has not changed since the beginning of the crisis. We want the money to go through the UN only, so as to avoid that the funds go to the wrong place. So the role of UN agencies is to act as a 'buffer'.'[59]

The exceptionality of this arrangement was invoked to highlight the incompetence of the Lebanese state. My interviewees often compared Lebanon – in terms of administrative capabilities, budget, rule of law, transparency levels, corruption, etc. – with war-torn countries where a degree of 'governance efficiency' has enabled donors to transfer foreign funding to the state. One ECHO officer commented:

'Usually, you give the money to the state. Even in Afghanistan and Iraq, the state receives part of our money. In Jordan, with the Palestinian authority, we give them money directly, from donors to the state. For instance, in education, the money would go to the relevant ministry, and then agencies and NGOs have their own projects. But in Lebanon, it's impossible! Donors cannot give to the state. The government does not even have a budget. All the money would need to go to paying civil servants, as their position don't exist or are not paid. You would have to create ministries from scratch.'[60]

At the beginning of its economic crisis, Lebanon was likened to a 'failed state' such as Somalia – as the crisis deepened, the idea of a 'Somalisation' of Lebanon gained traction. UNHCR officers made frequent comparisons to countries where they had previously been stationed, which they believed experienced more 'hardship' than Lebanon (a country they regarded as an attractive destination used to reward senior staff). This decontextualisation/contextualisation rhetoric is highly depoliticising, as the countries they mentioned share little in common with Lebanon beyond being located in the global South and hosting UNHCR operations.

I concur with recent studies that have found that this idea of a policy vacuum in Lebanon is not accurate. As illustrated in the first chapter, regional and national mechanisms for refugee hosting have always existed in Lebanon (Fakhoury 2019). The state has declined to implement

---

59 Interview with a UNHCR officer, Tripoli, October 2018.
[60] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.

refugee protection policies for a variety of reasons, including ideological obstacles to citizenship and *de facto* reception of long-term residents. As mentioned in chapter one, the Lebanese state has capitalised on its 'ingrained political repertoire, understood as the types of interactions, norms, and routines that are inherent to the polity's governance mode' (Fakhoury 2017: 682), which refutes the idea of an absent state. Stel (2020) has likewise shown that 'inconsistencies and 'ignorance' represent a mode rather than an absence of governance. This scholarly perspective offers insight into the state's data deficiency – the last official census was conducted in 1932, no census has included refugees or foreign nationals, and the Ministry of Interior does not document the number or nature of NGOs or international entities operating in Lebanon.

As opposed to this image of 'policy vacuum', Lebanese actors frequently cited the historic ties between Lebanon and Syria, the Syrian occupation, and the presence of Syrian workers prior to 2011. An external officer from the MoSDP began her briefing with these words:

> 'Whenever you are studying the Syrian influx to Lebanon, you need to take into consideration the historical aspect. We are two people, but we share the same cultural heritage. The Syrian occupation has affected the relationship between those two people, especially as they have stayed in Lebanon for over thirty years.'[61]

According to an EU officer I spoke with, the international community 'mantra' became state 'capacity-building'.[62] Since the 1980's, global development discourse has prioritised good governance and the 'bureaucratisation of social action' (Escobar 1995: 53) that have generated technocratic interventions. A 'buzzword' (Cornwall & Eade: 2010) of international development and UNHCR jargon, capacity-building is generally understood as 'the creation of institutions in less-developed states or the training of governmental officials' (Pecoud 2015: 96). Field studies have illustrated its depoliticising potential. Around 2015, as the protracted nature of the Syrian conflict became apparent, donors shifted their focus from purely humanitarian to developmental matters and progressively integrated capacity-building into their projects. During a coordination session in the Beqaa in January 2020, UNHCR representatives recommended their partnered INGOs and agencies dedicate at least 15% of their budget to

---

[61] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.
[62] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.

'capacity-building'. This approach has been criticised by some humanitarian workers, however, who maintain that without state structure or commitment, such projects are futile. The frustration of one EU official was tangible:

> 'The international donor community say they want to do capacity-building in Lebanon. But capacity-building for what? There is nothing to build, as there is nothing! The capacity-building can go to decentralised structures, for instance service networks for water, but that's it. At the national level, it's impossible to do capacity-building.'[63]

My interviewees' insistence on the ignorance of Lebanese officials, their claims of having to 'display pedagogy' with local authorities, clearly displayed the power disparities inherent to capacity-building:

> 'Slowly, with pedagogy, we manage to explain our approach, the UNHCR approach, and to communicate with them about sensitive issues, refugee protection, returns, etc. It takes a lot of time.'[64]

They considered many Lebanese policy changes, such as waiving the 200 USD residency renewal fee for Syrian refugees at General Security that was announced in 2016, to be 'the outcome of UNHCR advocacy'.[65] In reality, the inconsistency of the policy's application suggests a strategy of the 'politic of uncertainty' (Stel, 2020) intended to coerce Syrians into leaving Lebanon.

My field research has shown that since the onset of the crisis, the agency has strongly advocated for the establishment of a singular authority dedicated to the refugee response. My informants framed the absence of such an entity as an issue for the UN and evidence that Lebanese authorities did not understand the severity of the humanitarian crisis. This narrative overlooks the fact that because Syrian circulations were within the scope of the 'special regime' between the two countries in the 1990s, the MFA and MoI were responsible for supervising the Syrian presence. Consistent with the emphasis on capacity – building, UNHCR has attempted to foster cooperation at the state level in order to improve state structures and accommodations for

---

[63] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.
[64] Interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, January 2020.
[65] Interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, January 2020.

refugees and citizens alike. The agency has thus pushed for the creation of a singular entity to manage the refugee response. Although the MoSDP was eventually funded in 2016, it plays a purely symbolic role because the MoSA remains the official state coordinator of the Syrian response. The MoSDP's human resources are limited, with only approximately thirty staff members from 2016 to 2018.[66] UNHCR's repeated requests to collaborate with government officials on a Syrian response plan resulted in the LCRP, which was drafted and implemented in 2017.[67] As a concession to reluctant Lebanese authorities, the support plan included vulnerable Lebanese groups among its beneficiaries. The cooperation has nevertheless remained formal – most of the international and local actors whom I interviewed claimed that they had never interacted with or met a member of the MoSA or the MoSDP.

UN officials have relied on two types of explanations to justify their narrative of an incompetent state, both of which promote a depoliticised worldview. The first is sectarian tensions and the difficulties inherent in the power-sharing system. For instance, a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office informed me that the most notable characteristic of Lebanon is that:

> 'A national consensus on any topic or issue is not possible. Anything: national policies, foreign policy, refugees … It's impossible. Encouraging a debate about refugee-hosting, so they would decide on one consistent policy, is an impossible task. Could it be otherwise? Frankly speaking, I don't know. Any debate here is toxic.'[68]

An EU officer expressed frustration over the hurdles that were impeding several projects:

> 'The Minister of Water is Christian. There is a big water project in the Beqaa, where most refugees live. But he will go to Mount Lebanon, where there aren't many refugees, and less issues with water. If we give them 10 million to deal with water issues in the Beqaa, he won't want to use [the] and he will give the money to UNICEF because there is no accountability!'[69]

---

[66] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.
[67] The LCRP gather 104 national and international partners and target 2,8 billion vulnerable people living in Lebanon. Via the Ministry of Health, Education and Social Affairs, it combines the efforts of the Lebanese government with those of UN agencies such as WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNDP, and several local NGOs.
[68] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018.
[69] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.

When questioned about the rationale behind these divisions, my informants merely stated, 'this is complicated' and 'it is unexplainable'. Members of the organisation have attributed more to the lack of a coherent refugee policy in Lebanon to an incapacity for agreement (due to sectarian tensions) than to reluctance to host refugees. However, an exclusively sectarian lens provides a limited perspective. First, it inaccurately characterises the behaviour of state officials, who have been remarkably consistent in their refusal to host refugees and in their strategies to coerce them to leave. Second, this view relies on an essentialised interpretation of sectarian identities that presents Lebanese policies as an organic feature rather than an outcome of conscious political choices. As illustrated in the previous chapter, 'far from being immutable and ahistorical essences, sectarian identities, like other vertical cleavages, are historical constructions; their intensity and centrality to modes of political mobilisation is based on specific political, ideological, and geopolitical contexts' (Salloukh et al. 2016: 1). Rather than a product of an 'essential' Lebanese identity, the hegemony of sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilisation is the result of deliberate strategies implemented by sectarian and political elites. This singular focus on sectarianism is depoliticising because it fails to consider political economy or the underlying political and class tensions that drive clientelism (Traboulsi 2012; Salloukh et al. 2016).[70] The reification of these identities and the notion that they cannot be logically explained echo the words of Daher (2016: 14) on the 'prevailing Orientalism within much of the study of the Arab world. This Orientalism tends to hold up the region as being beyond the grasp of social scientific framework typically employed to understand processes of political change elsewhere in the world'.

The second category of explanations concerns corruption and bad governance. My interlocutors overwhelmingly cited corruption as the primary obstacle to improving the state's hosting capacity. One interviewee described corruption as the 'cancer of Lebanon', echoing the famous words of former World Bank president James Wolfensohn.[71] Like capacity-building, 'corruption' is a key depoliticising 'buzzword' in development discourse. Koechlin (2013: 10) examines the 'anti-politics of corruption', defined as 'an interrelated set of highly normative

---

[70] As Salloukh puts it, 'this hybrid configuration, with an institutionally weak but centralised state, in which confessional elites often align with foreign powers in an attempt to bolster their power against domestic opponents, sustains a stubborn institutional and clientelist complex, allows the political and confessional elite to reproduce confessional identities and institutional dynamics, and exposes the country to external manipulation, geopolitical competition and perpetual crisis' (*ibid*.: 112).

[71] In 1996, during his speech at the World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings, Wolfensohn urged the Bank Group to confront what he termed the 'cancer of corruption', resulting in a dramatic increase in anti-corruption efforts in subsequent years.

social imaginaries and resource-rich technocratic interventions aimed at fundamentally restructuring state-society relations'. Since the 1990's, a consensus has emerged in the global development community that 'poor governance and corruption undermine efforts in the South to fight poverty, to improve access to basic services, to establish responsible governance and to improve the quality of life for all' (*ibid*.: 25). Corruption has increasingly been identified as the primary obstacle to good governance (another 'buzzword'), with (good) governance and (anti) corruption becoming 'almost synonymous with development' (Szeftel 1998). My informants voiced an expectation that the much-lauded signature of Lebanon at the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2009 would soon translate into the creation of a public body, the Anti-Corruption Commission. However, this view prioritises discussions of state efficiency over meaningful political debates. National observers have agreed that eradicating corruption requires more than a series of apolitical technocratic fixes in the name of good governance: 'Lebanon's revamped anti-corruption strategy is more theatrics to return Lebanon into the fold of the international donor community and transnational capitalism', as commented by two journalists in a Lebanese independent media.[72]

Filtered through a variety of technical registers, this depoliticised 'depiction' of Lebanon has become embedded in a 'governance agenda' that minimises the role of the Lebanese state. The UNHCR avoids controversial debates to ensure its presence in the field, often at the cost of critical analysis. By privileging formal legalistic discussions, the agency overlooks complex issues that offer insight into the political, economic, ideological, and cultural underpinnings of the refugee situation in Lebanon, such as the neo-patrimonial logic of profiteering and global disparities in 'burden-sharing'. Facilitated by multiple actors in refugee governance, the UNHCR's denial of the state's political agency perpetuates power imbalances by minimising the capabilities of the refugee regime, projecting a fatalism that is deeply depoliticising, as it denies the idea of political decision.

---

[72] Source: Karim Merhej & Sintia Issa, 'Anti-corruption: a neoliberal strategy to breathe new life into Lebanon's Spoils-Sharing System?', *The Public Source*, 12 April 2021, available at: https://thepublicsource.org/anti-corruption-lebanon, [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

C) A narrative of good cooperation

The depoliticisation of the relations between the UNHCR and Lebanon also entails the promotion of a narrative of good cooperation between the international donor community and the host state, smoothing out disagreements. In conversations, representatives of the international community emphasised good cooperation with the government and made no mention of conflicts between them.[73] For instance, a representative of the European External Action Service (EEAS) emphasised the 'common priorities' and 'constructive engagement' between the EU and Lebanon on the Syrian response:

'The engagement has been constructive with the Lebanese authorities for the Syrian response. In the end, we share the same priorities. We want to ensure a good level of protection and assistance for Syrians until they can return. The dialogue has been really positive so far, despite the political instability in Lebanon.'[74]

A representative of the UNHCR said that:

'There is a growing consensus to work side by side to address the topic of refugee return. This is a sensitive issue here in Lebanon, because of the Palestinian precedents. They are afraid that refugees will settle here for good. But we are showing them that this is not what will happen, our ultimate goal is to ensure their return to Syria. And they see that.'[75]

Likewise, this representative insisted that the (although) polemic non-encampment policy was hailed as 'a good policy, facilitating our protection mandate':

'In many countries the UNHCR has advocated for the establishment of camps. In Jordan, for instance. But our position has been evolving on this. It is not the best solution everywhere. Camps are convenient for delivering basic assistance. But in a country such

---

[73] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018; interview with a UNHCR officer, Tripoli, 9 October 2018; interview with a representative of EEAS, Brussels, February 2020.
[74] Interview with a representative of EEAS, Brussels, February 2020.
[75] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.

as Lebanon, living in cities, in small towns, can help Syrians integrate better, find jobs, etc. So in the end, it was a good policy, facilitating our protection mandate.'[76]

Likewise, the relations with the Lebanese Army, the GSO and the Ministry of Interior was praised in the management of refugee camps, and in the monitoring of returns to Syria. With representatives of foreign embassies and the EU, the topic of the conflictual relations with the government was brought back to an issue of 'internal politics and rivalries' or to the personal level, representatives of European embassies blaming Gebran Bassil's hot-tempered personality: 'with him, it reaches a personal level. He is like this with everybody, all the Western diplomats. This is for his political ambitions'.[77]

My interlocutors stressed that they were not affected by Lebanon's political instability, because in spite of it Lebanon has maintained a degree of continuity of administration since 2011. When it comes to the operational aspects of the Syrian response, UNHCR representatives declared that they have pursued a sustained dialogue with the same established counterparts in the relevant ministries – the MoI, the MoSA, the Ministry of Health and relevant municipalities – over the past years. For instance, a UNHCR protection officer said that:

'I think this [the instability] has not affected us that much. Lebanon has frequently had periods of care-taker governments, or political fragmentation of some sort, so, I would not say that this has been a big challenge. We have our established counterparts in the relevant ministries, in the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and you know, they have continued working. One constraint of course is that policy decisions, changes in legislation or policies, have not been adopted, but this happens everywhere. On a more practical level, we have continued our collaboration'.[78]

Thus, to legitimise foreign interventions, the UNHCR has established a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, fragmentation, and a country perpetually in crisis. Without regard for political context, these narratives have shaped international actions towards a country designated and reified as a 'land of refuge'. To analyse

---

[76] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018.
[77] Interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, January 2020; and Paris, February 2020.
[78] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.

such 'reification', the notion of Orientalism can be useful: it comes from Edward Said's seminal analysis of European literature showing that the West has come to view Arab countries as 'inferior', through an 'orientalist' and colonialist gaze objectifying Eastern identities. Yet, this Orientalism is at the core of bordering processes, as shown by Fine (2016): orientalist discourse appears as a way to influence criteria dividing 'desirable' and 'undesirable' mobility. She argues that orientalist categorisation of states and populations cannot be separated from research into mobility governance:

> 'Orientalist discourses would appear to influence criteria dividing desirable from undesirable mobility. Orientalism produces a master dualism, namely the West and the rest, which feeds other dualisms, particularly Christian and Muslim and the biopolitical dualism of desirable and undesirable.' (*ibid*.: 34).

She draws on Walters's work (2015: 11) to show how international migration and refuge governance relates to post-coloniality to feed into a 'racialisation of borders', affecting both states and migrants.

Further, the depoliticisation of UNHCR relations with the host states goes through the promotion of a narrative of good cooperation, smoothing out disagreements. Before delving into the UNHCR's policies related to mobility in the next sections, i.e. registration, resettlement and return, I unravel the logics of action deployed by UNHCR in its everyday practices and show to which extent these are vehicles of its depoliticisation.

III. Depoliticised logics of action: technocratic distancing, neutrality claims and vulnerability politics

In this section, I unravel the logics of action deployed by the UNHCR in its responses to Syrian refugees. In particular, I show how the UNHCR legitimises its action through the promotion of its expertise to answer refugee needs, depicting itself as an apolitical and neutral organisation, and acting as a 'norm entrepreneur' and a pragmatic manager of the presence of refugees.

Studies have presented the UNHCR as an agency that has 'increasingly affirmed its authority by depoliticising, moralising and turning issues that are inherently political into technical ones' (Fresia 2014: 524-5; as well as Scalettaris 2013). According to Fine (2016), both the UNHCR and the IOM 'assert epistemic authority through their positioning as depoliticised actors who provide assistance to states in the form of policy recommendations, the dissemination of best practices, capacity-building and evidence-based policy development' (81). Thus, the production of knowledge about refugees represents a fully-fledged arena of power, which allows the UNHCR to capitalise on its status of expert to provide policy recommendations. This depoliticisation has been facilitated by the evolution of the UNHCR's role worldwide, as the agency has been shifting its focus from legal protection and the search for durable solutions (its original mandate), two activities that touch upon political dynamics, to relief and operational assistance, which are more prone to depoliticisation (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012). The delegation of protection and security activities to agencies such as the UNHCR falls within the process of 'agencification' (or 'the delegation of regulatory tasks to independent agencies' ... 'as the consequence of a search for impartiality and expertise', Fawcett et al. 2017: 134). This leads to technocratic distancing, which entails distancing of authority and implementation of issues through delegation to other bodies, usually composed of experts deployed to entrench a certain way of seeing and defining problems and prompts the development of models and methodologies to manage such problems. It is highly depoliticising because it can obscure the explicitly political nature of decisions, as it makes it harder to trace their origin and moves them away from public scrutiny. Indeed, in conversations, my interlocutors formulated a rationalist – technocratic discourse with constant references to the UNHCR's 'best practices' or 'humanitarian standards', supported by the dissemination of informational and universal and neutral formats that avoid partisan controversies, such as reports, factsheets, maps and training material.

A) The UNHCR as a neutral and apolitical organisation: drawing a line between the technical and the political

This depoliticised narrative also operates by drawing an essential demarcation between the inherently technical and the inherently political, despite the evidence of blurred boundaries between expertise and politics (Louis & Maertens 2021: 36). The UNHCR has been described as a 'pragmatic agency',[79] 'a technical agency' which 'does not do politics'.[80] A UNHCR employee said that:

'[The] UNHCR, the WHO [World Health Organization], UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], they are humanitarian agencies. They don't interfere in the political decisions, not at all. They only interfere in order to advocate for the rights of refugees.'[81]

Likewise, a representative of ECHO distinguishes the political line from the humanitarian line. Talking about refugee return to Syria, she mentioned that:

'The topic of return is a grey zone. There is a grey zone between humanitarian, development and political work in Syria. The political line of the EU is that the conditions are not met for refugee return. The humanitarian line is the same. Sometimes, the political line of the EU, and the humanitarian line that we represent, go together. Sometimes they don't, but in this case they do.'[82]

Such statements give the impression that the humanitarian and the political are two separate realms. This worldview was also visible when the interviewees from local NGOs were fleshing out the limits of the UNHCR's technical approach:

---

[79] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018.
[80] Interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[81] Interview with a UHNCR officer, Zahle, December 2018.
[82] Interview with a representative of ECHO, Brussels, February 2020.

'Between the UNHCR and the Lebanese government, in particular the MFA, now there is a real crisis. And now the crisis has reached a very political element and not a technical one. And [the] UNHCR does not know how to speak politics. They only see things through the lens of technical advice. It is a different approach. If we say 'no refoulement', it is a political statement, but they treat it as a technical issue.'[83]

This apolitical and humanitarian rhetoric was also visible in the words of Lebanese officials. To illustrate the divergence of approach between the MoSA and the MFA, a representative of the MoSA argued that:

'At MoSA, our mandate is very clear: it is to help these people in a humanitarian way. We should not look at the Syrian crisis from another point of view than the humanitarian one. We are not going to the political aspect of things. This is not our role: we only support refugees for their concrete needs.'[84]

Another crucial element in the UNHCR's narrative is the 'neutrality claim'. Neutrality means that actors remain wholly uninfluenced by national interests; in practice, it refers to the 'non-interference' in internal states' affairs. The UNHCR claims to be apolitical: as such, it is not responsible for the quality of the asylum provided in the host country (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012). Likewise, it has no legal right to force states to contribute to burden-sharing (through donations or refugee resettlement). The claim to be apolitical translates into an acceptance of the political circumstances in which the agency intervenes. In reports and official declarations, the UNHCR refuses to address the October policies, deportation, forced returns, human rights abuse, torture of Syrians in jails and the interviewees emphasised their position of 'impartial observer' non-interfering in 'sensitive' issues. In his statement given on 15 March 2021, the UNHCR representative used abstract expressions such as 'the failure of the world to end one of its biggest humanitarian crises' with no concrete mention of the Syrian regime's atrocities, the lack of burden-sharing or Lebanese authorities' restrictive policies towards Syrian refugees.[85]

---

[83] Interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[84] Interview with a representative of the MoSA, Beirut, December 2019.
[85] For instance, see UNHCR Lebanon – operational factsheets (2019); and the statement of Ayaki Ito, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon, on 15 March 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/lb/14303-a-lost-decade-for- syrians-a-stark-reminder-of-the-failure-to-solve-the-biggest-humanitarian-crisis-of-our-time.html/.

The function of this repertoire for the international community is, by avoiding accusations of political interference, to be able to operate in the country and to avoid controversies about its action. Therefore, depoliticisation involves an attempt to deny, forget or hide the undecidable, contingent and ultimately political character of governance: 'depoliticisation invokes a naturalising totalisation of social meanings and identities that presents them as something that is given and to be taken for granted and, therefore, cannot be called into question and transformed through action' (Fawcett et al. 2017: 49). In conversations, the interviewees ignored the disagreements between the Lebanese authorities and the international community, as well as the fundamentally political aspect of the fact that 95% of Syrian refugees are hosted by neighbouring states while 'Fortress Europe' has kept its borders closed despite the dire humanitarian situation in Syria and in host countries. Representatives of European governments did not mention the global socio-economic and political context underlying refugee governance or the power relations underpinning it. The legitimacy of such a governance system was never put into question; and the EU member states' choice to keep their borders closed and to promote a securitised perception of refugees was rarely addressed publicly or in my interactions, and when it was, it was not framed as a choice but as a necessity. Furthermore, the EU having limited competence in deciding each member state's refugee quotas, EU representatives did not draw attention to it.

A) Hierarchies of 'vulnerability' and security logic of stabilisation

As I have indicated above, the construction of the 'Syrian refugee crisis' as a humanitarian emergency has entailed a discursive emphasis on the suffering body requiring compassionate humanitarian assistance, over the threatened body requiring the protection of rights. This is in line with Liisa Malkki's (1995) ethnographic observations that humanitarian practices make refugees into 'universal man' and set up a 'bare, naked or minimal humanity' configured as an object of charity rather than a subject of law. Cole describes vulnerability studies as part of the growing body of 'contemporary work about the emotive aspects of politics', in the context of the 'affective turn in philosophy and social theory' (Cole 2016: 261). She claims that the move from 'victimhood' to 'vulnerability' is part of an abandonment of the 'vocabulary of injustice'

(Cole 2016: 269). Vulnerability has also been approached as a depoliticising 'labelling practice classifying some forced migrants' (Sözer 2020 & 2021; Zetter 1991). Yet, scholars have criticised essentialist categorical ideals of vulnerability for overlooking heterogeneity and implying a fixed state of being which conceptually rules out a change of circumstances (Sözer 2020). Indeed, refugees are framed by humanitarian agencies through the exclusive prism of their needs. Critical scholars have outlined that the focus on needs is a powerful vector of the depoliticisation of the interventions of humanitarian organisations: according to Maertens & Louis (2021), it is part of the 'functional pragmatic logic of depoliticisation [...] the more IOs focus on the contingent necessity to answer needs, the less relevant political debates on the merits of their interventions become' (113-114). This is reflected by an omnipresence of the idiom of refugee non-controversial needs in the UN's, donors' and INGOs' communication: it materialises in their reports, leaflets and visual rhetoric with iconography of vulnerability, where Syrian refugees are presented as humanitarian victims and never as victims of human rights violations. This is supported by neutral vehicles such as storytelling because they do not carry a direct political message but tell the story of an individual case.

The definition of needs by the UNHCR has evolved from a legalistic one, to one addressing minimum standards in health, education and housing, and immediate life-saving services in emergency situations. In particular, during the 1990s health specialists became increasingly involved in the UNHCR's processes for assessing needs. In Regional Protections Programmes, needs are placed above protection in the hierarchy of priorities (Stevens 2016: 275). Thus, refugees are classified not according to their legal status, but to their vulnerability level. Every year, the UNHCR, the UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) carry a 'Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon', whose aim is to 'prioritise refugees who are most in need of help' since 'certain cases require different assistance than others' (UNHCR 2019c & 2020c). Refugee vulnerability in Lebanon is defined as 'the risk of exposure of Syrian refugee households to harm, primarily in relation to protection threats, inability to meet basic needs, limited access to basic services, and food insecurity, and the ability of the population to cope with the consequences of harm' (UNHCR 2019c & 2020c). Other tools to assess vulnerability include the inter-Agency Vulnerability Map which identifies the most vulnerable cadastres, and the IDC's Vulnerability Screening Tool.

Thus, through a 'technocratic-rationalist' repertoire, the UNHCR deploys a hegemonic discourse on humanitarian governance based on its expertise to answer refugee needs. UN

agencies classify Syrian-registered refugees and refugees recorded as 'people of concern' within a system including four vulnerability levels, with relatively straightforward criteria such as minor to the more interpretive such as 'traumatised and seriously distressed' and 'demonstrated psycho-social disorder'. Vulnerability levels provide the basis for targeting the provision of assistance, in particular access to an ATM card with a specific monthly allowance, and/or in-kind support (food assistance from WFP or shelter). Studies have shown that the more international organisations focus on the contingent necessity to answer needs, the less relevant political debates on the merits of their interventions become (Louis & Maertens 2021: 114). Further, multiplying vulnerability categories leave the moral shield around the very notion of vulnerability immune to critical analysis (Sözer 2020). These labelling practices serve a purpose of selection: Syrian individuals are not considered vulnerable *per se*. There is an implicit 'hierarchy of misfortune' (Agier 2011) where being classified as highly vulnerable is advantageous for acquiring a deserving refugee status and access to relief aid. This compartmentalisation legitimises the UNHCR's expertise as it gives the appearance of logic and necessity to its answers, while claiming to be universally applicable, neutral and to limit the arbitrariness of state sovereignty.

In UN and NGO reports, Lebanon is constructed as a crisis-stricken country that needs to be 'stabilised'; in this context, 'self-reliance' and 'resilience' have come to be employed by humanitarian agencies as a back route to achieving social cohesion and stability.[86] The LCRP reads as follow: 'the overall objective of the Livelihoods Sector strategy is to evolve from alleviating the socio-economic shocks on the most vulnerable groups (especially youth, women, and people with special needs), to also move towards longer-term recovery and stabilisation by improving their access to income and employment [...] As in the previous years, the Government of Lebanon and national and international partners work together to deliver integrated and mutually reinforcing humanitarian and stabilisation interventions' (LCRP 2017-2020). My contention is that labels such as refugee resilience and social cohesion are entrenched in a securitised vision of Lebanon. Indeed, when Syrian displacement became protracted, the international donor community started to associate multi-sectarian, refugee-host coexistence with the risk of regional instability. This was also perceptible in interviews with foreign

---

[86] The UN developed different tools for social stability: the tension Task Forces part of the Social Stability Working/Core Group, the Mechanisms for Stability and Resilience, Lebanon Stabilisation Roadmap, the Vision for Stabilisation and Development in Lebanon, and the Mechanisms for Stability and Resilience.

officials, who expressed that the 'stability' of Lebanon was one of their main concerns, and one top priority of the refugee response. A French diplomat said that:

'We have been insisting on the fact that we want to avoid a regional spillover at all costs. The number one priority, especially since 2013, and since the killing of Soleimani, is to prevent Lebanon from entering any regional crisis. We exert pressure on the Lebanese authorities to avoid that. So they don't interfere in any regional conflict, especially in Iran. The dissociation policy is a key ingredient of Lebanon's stability'.[87]

This is in line with the shift in the UN definition of 'human security', from the state to the individual, embedded in a neoliberal worldview. Carpi (2021) qualifies humanitarian livelihood programming in Halba (in Akkar, North Lebanon) as 'neo-cosmetic', as it does not endanger the humanitarian-host relationship: according to her research, refugee self-reliance aims not to make Syrian refugees really autonomous but to enhance social cohesion. She sees livelihood and self-reliance activities as biopolitical strategies of containing local discontentment and forced migrants within the Middle East region. Thus, the UNHCR's narrative revolves around the need to 'empower' and support refugees towards self-resilience (contrary to the 'care and maintenance' approach predominantly before the 1990s). This is also perceptible in the visual rhetoric, where the UNHCR shows 'empowered' refugees (in class, at work, etc.). In particular, resettlement cases are advertised as 'success stories' in UNHCR centres on television screens, and stories of 'refugee resilience' on the UNHCR's website.[88] In addition, the use of ATM cards and vouchers is framed as bringing 'dignity' to refugees: 'to meet their basic needs in a dignified manner by allowing them to prioritise their purchases according to their needs' (LCRP 2021: 91). Refugee self-reliance is praised as a prevalent condition for their return: the UNHCR put forth the 'benefits of investing in human capital and building capacities that enable the refugees to contribute to the local society, cover their basic expenses and develop transferable skills, so that when the conditions are conducive to return, they will be able to use these skills to rebuild their future in Syria' (UNHCR 2017:4). Following this logic, to assess the success of its programs, the UNHCR has elaborated a set of indicators based on refugees themselves. For instance, refugee 'awareness' on their rights or the '% of women and girls accessing safe spaces reporting feeling empowered', or 'women, men, boys and girls know and exercise their rights

---

[87] Interview with a representative of the French MFA, Paris, February 2020.
[88] For example, see and stories of 'refugee resilience' on the UNHCR's website. For example, see https://www.unhcr.org/lb/12753- syrian-rose-farmer-uses-skills-to-graft-new-life-in-lebanon.html/.

especially in relation to civil documentation, legal residency and HLP' (UNHCR 2019b: 10-11). This is depoliticising because it decontextualises and places the responsibility of their situation on refugees themselves, while diverting from structural factors. Another depoliticisation pattern is the emphasis on 'negative coping mechanisms': according to UNHCR reports, the first aim of UN interventions is to prevent refugees from falling into 'bad coping mechanisms'[89] – one example of this is the 'back to school' campaign that the UNHCR and the UNICEF run every year on social media.

In this subsection, I have identified the logics of action deployed by the UNHCR in its everyday practices and shown to which extent these are vehicles of its depoliticisation. I now show how these logics of action permeate UNHCR policies related to Syrian mobility: first, registration (allowing them to legally stay in Lebanon), then resettlement to third countries, and finally, refugee return to Syria.

B) Refugee registration and de-registration: vulnerability politics and filtering and selection mechanisms

In this section, I deconstruct the politics surrounding refugee registration to illustrate the securitisation logic inherent to the UNHCR's work. The RSD (Refugee Status Determination) process is informed largely by filtering and exclusionary mechanisms (Kagan 2011). At first glance, refugee registration in Lebanon does not appear exclusionary because it requires significantly lower standards of proof than RSD (Janmyr 2017). I nevertheless maintain that refugee registration – and particularly deregistration – is infused with border security technologies, closely entangling security and humanitarian imperatives. My work demonstrates that the criteria used to delegitimise refugee claims (i.e. border-crossing) are arbitrary and minimise the plight of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, resulting in an increased enmeshment between the UNHCR's objectives and the Lebanese government's securitised perception of refugees. These findings corroborate the literature on the role of the UNHCR in the 'global police of population' (Scalettaris 2013; Scheel & Ratfisch 2014), as the dissemination of the

---

[89] These include: 'food-related coping strategies, child labour, withdrawing children from school, begging, recruitment and use of children by armed actors, substance abuse, not seeking medical treatment, involvement in drug related networks, child marriage, getting into debts, and dangerous onward movement' (UNHCR 2016).

UNHCR's refugee protection discourse creates 'figures of migration' justifying the build-up and perfection of border control.

The UNHCR utilises RSD to grant refugee status in most of its operations. RSD procedures can be understood as a 'biopolitical technique' with harsh consequences for the lives of those granted or denied legal status, transforming asylum seekers into targets for resettlement, detention, or deportation. The distinction between refugee and migrant established by the migration management regime is a critical component of RSD. The 'deserving' refugee is grounded in a liberal concept of individual rights that frames its opposite, the 'economic migrant', as undeserving (Nyers 2006). This imposes a hierarchy between 'legitimate' refugees in need of protection – whose cross-border movements are legitimised – and 'illegal' migrants. When Syrian arrivals began, the UNHCR equivocally characterised the flight of civilians from Syria as a 'refugee movement'. Issued in June 2012, the agency's first International Protection Consideration on the Syrian crisis specified that 'persons who left Syria and have approached the UNHCR and the respective host Governments have been registered as persons seeking international protection and are being assisted. Arrivals need to be afforded international protection and associated rights' (UNHCR 2012). In December 2012, the UNHCR updated these considerations, finding that it 'characterises the flight of civilians from Syria as a refugee movement'. Although this statement has been reiterated in subsequent updates and in the preamble of LCRPs, its terminology lacks explicit legal grounding concerning refugee status or protection.

Janmyr (2017) argues that in practice, Lebanon has been utilising a form of prima facie RSD that recognises refugee status on the basis of readily apparent and objective circumstances in a person's country of origin – or, in the case of stateless asylum seekers, their country of former habitual residence. Because this approach acknowledges that the dangers posed by these circumstances align with the applicable definition of refugees, prima facie refugees benefit from the full rights outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Recognising refugee status on a prima facie basis has been a common practice of both state governments and the UNHCR for over sixty years. Janmyr (*ibid*.: 400) regards the concept of 'refugee movement' as 'a new construction' that is 'a more careful formulation' than prima facie recognition because 'only in exceptional cases will asylum-seekers from Syria not meet the criteria of the refugee definition in the 1951 Convention'. According to a representative from the UNHCR, only five out of 600

requests for registration in May 2019 were denied.[90] Beyond the fact that Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, Janmyr (2017) contends that the UNHCR has avoided officially awarding prima facie refugee status for a number of 'political' and 'practical' reasons. First, she suggests that the UNHCR perceives the political costs of RSD as outweighing any potential protective gains. Second, Janmyr interprets this as a bureaucratic decision, as RSD consumes a significant amount of the organisation's human and economic resources. Third, she cites fears that combatants may exploit the prima facie process, as it typically forbids identification of individuals who fall under the exclusion clauses in articles 1C to 1F.

Thus, the process deployed between 2011 and 2015 amounts to a form of prima facie on the practical level, but is formally called 'registration' or 'recording'. After registration, refugees received a UNHCR registration certificate, which was valid for two years and entitled them to international protection and humanitarian assistance. The certificate did not confer a formal status recognised by the government, however, nor did it exempt refugees from penalties associated with irregular entry or failure to obtain a residency permit in Lebanon. Although the recognition of Syrian refugees increased 'by default' until 2014, my research indicates that exclusionary mechanisms have permeated UNHCR's subsequent activities, particularly in the form of deregistration.

C) The politics of numbers and governmental interference

One strategy used to assert control over the Syrian presence by the Lebanese government has been increased involvement in the UNHCR's registration process. In May 2015, the Ministerial Cabinet officially requested that the UNHCR refrain from registering refugees from Syria as of that month. The UNHCR was allowed to 'record' Syrians as 'persons of concern' so that potential registrants could appeal for UNHCR assistance. In practice, the policy did not impact general services such as psychosocial support, legal assistance, and eligibility for resettlement abroad. However, the organisation was prohibited from issuing certificates required to obtain residency in Lebanon. As previously noted, this decision is a consequence of a 2014 paradigm shift from the state in refugee governance that included increased state surveillance of the

---

[90] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.

Syrian presence in Lebanon and measures designed to prevent the influx of asylum seekers. The 2015 residency policy established that to obtain residency, refugees who were not registered with the UNHCR were required to seek the support of a *kafeel* – a Lebanese sponsor. Syrians could lawfully stay in Lebanon only if they registered with the UNHCR as a refugee or economic migrant under the sponsorship system. These decisions increased government authority over protection issues and significantly reduced the agency's capabilities.

Lebanese authorities' stated objective was to reduce the refugee population of 1.2 million 'by all possible means' (Stel 2020: 72, cited in Fakhoury & Stel 2022: 5). However, the policy changes have been widely construed as a political strategy. In private conversations, state officials and civil society actors agreed that because the such measures were largely ineffective, the Lebanese government was primarily concerned with the 'appearance' of state control. As an officer from MoSDP noted, 'it was a political decision – 'no, we don't want to register them because [then] we would be acknowledging that there is a conflict in Syria''.[91] She elaborated:

> 'Indeed, we started noticing the numbers decreasing; but this was mainly since many of the 1.5 million were legally resettled or they [had] fled illegally by sea during the 2015-2016 influx... Others returned to Syria. Still, for the government of Lebanon towards its public, the number has decreased, and it was a successful policy.'

The director of a Lebanese NGO proclaimed:

> 'It was a political decision. Because it is not a technical issue, it is a political issue. The government didn't want to see the official numbers reaching 1.5 million. Or 2 million. And when you don't have official numbers, you can always use it politically. Like the case of the Palestinian refugees. How many refugees now? 100,000? 200,000? The new number is 180,000? It is more politically 'appealing' to have anecdotes and not clear figures.'[92]

---

91 Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.
92 Interview with a representative of the NGO ALEF, Beirut, December 2018.

This final quote is particularly noteworthy in illustrating the extent to which the 'politics of uncertainty' and agnotology ingrained in the Lebanese mode of governance have crystallised around debates over the number of Syrian refugees (Stel 2020).

D) Biopolitical and surveillance practices

The registration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon uses the same technological and surveillance practices as RSD – the UNHCR collects biodata such as iris scans, information on religion and ethnicity, photographs, brief reasons for flight and fear of return, copies of documents, etc., and files the information in its Refugee Assistance Information System database. The UNHCR's primary justification for engaging in biopolitical and surveillance practices is the need to safeguard against fraud and multiple registrations. When I visited the Tripoli office in November 2018, the officer who briefed me showed me the room used for facial recognition scanners including biometric iris scans and where biometric data are taken from Syrian individuals as part of the registration process. By connecting the North Lebanon system to national and regional databases, which include Jordan and Turkey, UNHCR can verify that an individual has not applied for assistance in multiple countries. In an adjacent room, children are vaccinated when they arrive, a juxtaposition that epitomises the humanitarian 'care/control' nexus. According to my informant, it fulfils a sort of performative function:

> 'The biometric identification, this iris scan, it is here as a way of showing ourselves as a humanitarian entity that we are being careful about the fairness of the treatment; and a way of being able to say that refugees don't take advantage of the situation. It is more this, a matter of the image we give to the world rather than a tool to prevent refugees from actually claiming aid in different countries. Because this almost never happens anyway.'[93]

Likewise, this testimony from a Syrian individual who went through the registration process supports the idea that biodata collecting by the UNHCR is mainly cosmetic:

---

[93] Interview with a UNHCR officer, Tripoli, October 2018.

'When I was first registered with the UNHCR in 2016 they sat us in one room to use the technology of iris recognition. The UNHCR office said that it was to make sure we are registered as refugees only in one place. But from Lebanon, you cannot go anywhere, I couldn't go to Jordan or to Turkey to get aid there.'[94]

Indeed, there is no evidence that suggests that refugees are also able to claim aid in Turkey or Jordan, as such trips would be administratively, logistically, and financially impossible. This example illustrates how biased perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' refugees inform policymaking – as well as UNHCR's awareness of the state's increased scrutiny of its activities. It can be inferred that the collection of biometric data is part of the standardisation of the UNHCR procedure across its field operations, as it has also been used in Jordan. This is symptomatic of the generalisation of procedures where refugees are expected to give vast amounts of information and biometric data, including sensitive information, without being properly informed on their future use, thus disrespecting the rule of consent. This has increased distrust towards the UNHCR (Kaurin 2019). Another interviewee shared his fear that his information would be given to the Syrian government:

'We don't really know what they do with these data. They don't tell us anything. Do they give them to the Lebanese government? I assume they might. They probably do not give them to the regime in Syria. But what if the MoSA of the MFA share this information with the Syrian regime?'[95]

The WFP also uses biometric identification for the use of e-cards.[96] Both agencies started to conduct 'joint e-card validation exercises' to ensure that the correct beneficiaries are in possession of the e-cards. The technology used to implement this system is provided by a Jordanian-British company Iris Guard,[97] while WFP's financial service provider is Banque Libano-Française. In the following quote, a UN representative articulates a rhetoric of needs concealing the security dimension of these biometric practices:

---

[94] Interview with a Syrian individual, Beirut, December 2018.
[95] Interview with a Syrian individual, Beirut, January 2019.
[96] Source: WFP 2022. E-cards have been used by the WFP in Lebanon as early as 2013. They function as food vouchers and cash assistance: Syrian registered refugees can use them in shops to buy food or essential items or withdraw cash at an ATM. Beneficiaries receive USD 27/person as well as USD 175/household each month to contribute towards their food and other essential needs. WFP is reaching almost 200,000 Syrian refugees with this modality. Relief Web 2022.
[97] Source: 'Liban Post Case Study', IrisGuard, https://www.irisguard.com/technology/case-studies/liban-post/

'Now, three times a year, we do these 'verification exercise'. We want to avoid confusion. So, we use biometric technology, both facial recognition and iris scanning, to check that the right beneficiary uses the right card. It is time consuming, but it is very important. The WFP is trying to scale up these operations, in partnership with the UNHCR. The idea is really that the aid should go to those who need it most.'[98]

In spite of their performative nature, the UNHCR carries out 'verification exercises' every six months, sometimes three times a year.[99] The use of iris recognition to regulate fund flows to recipients is commonplace practice for UN agencies. This is time-consuming and requires significant human resources – each of the four reception centres of the UNHCR's suboffices receives around 1,000 refugees daily to record the arrival or departure of family members, etc. Thus, between 2012 and 2018, the UNHCR tripled the number of staff dedicated to biodata collection.[100] In theory, this enables the UNHCR to assist refugees with missing paperwork and legal counsel, but the primary reason for the increase in staff was fraud prevention. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNHCR has conducted most of its operations remotely, which heightened concerns about potential fraud. Asked to identify the most challenging aspect of this shift, a UNHCR protection officer responded:

'I think what has been challenging with the cash assistance program is that refugees would normally need to come [in] physically to verify occasionally – to check that they have the card, that this is the right person, to avoid situations where maybe someone returned to Syria but gave the card to someone else in the community. We need to be sure that the assistance is really going to the right person. We had to switch to remote, by SMS, [to] avoid making people come in groups to validation sites. So, despite this, we have to make sure that the money would go to the right person. We want to avoid at all costs incorrect beneficiary identification.'[101]

---

[98] Interview with a representative of the WFP, Beirut, October 2021. Report: the future of biometrics and digital ID in Lebanon: assessing proposed systems for elections and social assistance, January 2021 (SMEX).
[99] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.
[100] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.
[101] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.

The UNHCR has been criticised for sharing biodata with governments and participating in the 'global police of population' in other circumstances (Scheel & Ratfisch 2014). In Lebanon, the MoI and the MFA have repeatedly requested that UNHCR share its list of beneficiaries, which UNHCR has emphatically refused because doing so would pose significant security risks for Syrians. Refugees whose status is not regularised or whose profile may be deemed problematic can be arbitrarily detained by the Internal Security Forces and the Army or deported back to Syria. As remarked by the director of a human-rights NGO:

'A lot of Syrians get detained sporadically, and then released after a few days. Sometimes for one or two hours, or two days, three days…I think this is to build profiles. Intelligence and security agencies in Lebanon are interested in building profiles of Syrian individuals.'[102]

Moreover, the Lebanese authorities could potentially share these lists with the Syrian regime, with dire consequences for the safety of asylum seekers in the event of a return to Syria. The UNHCR informed the authorities that it was MoSA's decision whether to share the list of Syrian beneficiaries; eventually, MoSA refused for the same reasons. 'It is a good thing. Probably for political rivalries, but the outcome was positive', commented a French diplomat.[103]

During the COVID outbreak in 2020, however, UNHCR relented and shared a list of beneficiaries with the MoI, as the ministry had threatened to prohibit UNHCR from delivering food and health assistance.[104] Officially, the MoI claimed they needed the lists to regulate the movement of aid workers during lockdowns and curfews. This decision has been heavily criticised by the humanitarian community and civil society alike. Faced with a similar dilemma, other humanitarian entities such as the Norwegian Refugee Council refused to share their lists, and their operations were consequently suspended by the state.[105]

---

[102] Interview with a representative of ALEF, Beirut, December 2018.
[103] Interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, January 2020.
[104] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.
[105] Interview with a representative of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Beirut, September 2021.

E) The practice of 'deregistration': Depoliticisation through rationalisation

Another strategy employed by the Lebanese government to limit the Syrian presence in its territory is the deregistration of refugees. When Lebanon reached the symbolic threshold of one million Syrian refugees, the state began monitoring border crossings and recorded about 18,000 Syrians registered as refugees allegedly commuting across the border.[106] State authorities ordered the UNHCR to deregister these refugees and issued a new regulation intended to revoke the protective status of those travelling back to Syria on re-entry into Lebanon. After the new entry and residency regulations were implemented in January 2015, the UNHCR received new requests to deregister about 1,400 Syrian refugees who had arrived in Lebanon after the new regulations went into effect. The cessation of refugee status is arguably one of the most complex and problematic issues with UNHCR operations (Janmyr 2018). Notable among the UNHCR's ceased circumstance clauses is the voluntary re-availment of national protection, although 'the true intention of the individual to re-avail themselves of the protection of the country of nationality should be confirmed' (*ibid*.: 409). Equally relevant is a clause regarding 'voluntary re-establishment in the state of origin', which is understood as return to the country of nationality or former habitual residence with the intention of permanently residing there. Temporary travel to the former home country – as a 'go-and-see visit' or to visit a sick family member, for instance – does not constitute 're-establishment' and therefore does not impact refugee status' (UNHCR 2003b: 198, cited in Janmyr 2018: 409). Extensive reports on the conditions of Syrian refugees have shown that these restrictions fail to account for the complexities of voluntary return. By default, any practice that falls beyond the narrow scope of the outlined conditions is deemed unlawful. Moreover, 'for de-registration to be lawful, it would require a full range of procedural safeguards, including the chance to prepare a response' (*ibid*.: 409).

Despite the lack of a legal basis for deregistration, the UNHCR has appeared remarkably compliant with state authorities. By the end of June 2014, the institution had allegedly stripped 12,345 Syrians of refugee status.[107] In October 2014, former UNHCR representative N. Kelley

---

[106] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.
[107] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.

informed local media that 68,000 Syrian refugees had had their 'status revoked' between June and October of that year. The situation in Lebanon is not unique – legal scholars (Janmyr 2018; Stevens 2016) have criticised the UNHCR for being 'too casual' with ceasing refugee protection in the past. The UNHCR's official rhetoric maintains that the organisation has deregistered Syrians for 'commuting' into Syria. Former representative Kelley informed the local press in October 2014 that:

> 'We have looked at those names and tried to determine what number of those names, because there are a lot of names, also match our database, and then we have called people in... to interview them and find out their reasons for going back. And we have deregistered people for whom going back to Syria has shown that they aren't in need of international protection or assistance, and that's something that we have done willingly with the government, recognising that refugee status is for persons who have a well-founded fear of persecution and are fleeing civil unrest inside Syria.'[108]

This statement was further confirmed by testimonies from two Syrian refugees who happened to be stripped out of their refugee status, one for 'lack of vulnerability' and the other for having returned to Syria for a few days.[109]

A significant number of reports have underscored the dire security, social, and economic issues in Syria while also challenging the idea that commuting refugees 'aren't in need of international protection or assistance' (Mhaissen & Hodges 2019). My empirical data illustrates other justifications for deregistration, including vulnerability politics. One UN officer stated:

> 'We want to make sure that the ones who receive the aid are not working, or that the head of the household is not working. Because then, they are not considered refugees anymore, they are considered as migrant workers, and the aid should go to another Syrian person.'[110]

---

[108] This statement was pronounced after 68,000 Syrian refugees had their 'status revoked' between June and October of that year (Janmyr 2018).
[109] Interview with a Syrian refugee, Tripoli, January 2019. Interview with a Syrian refugee, Beirut, January 2019.
[110] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, Zoom, March 2021.

A protection NGO worker observed that:

> 'When we allocate aid, we want to check that the ones who receive the aid are very, very vulnerable. The most vulnerable. It is really about degrees of vulnerability and about being able to identify the ones who are the most in need. This is why we use all these criteria, to make sure the aid goes to the right people or households.'[111]

These statements reify the dichotomous logic of refugee protection discourse. The refugee label is not determined by the level of concern for an individual's safety in their home country, but rather by a dichotomy between 'deserving' and 'less deserving' refugees. The first quote reflects a superficial distinction between refugees (who have no access to livelihood) and migrants (who are capable of working), whereas the second is symptomatic of a 'hierarchy of suffering' (Agier 2011).

When I visited one of the UNHCR's suboffices in December 2018, dozens of refugees had assembled since early morning in the reception area to protest their deregistration. A UNHCR officer explained that the agency had notified concerned refugees of deregistration decisions only the night before. He commented:

> 'Refugees communicate a lot between them, through text messages, WhatsApp… So, what happened is that they all heard at the same time that 10,000 of them were cut out of cash assistance. That's why they complain. But in reality, what they do not know is that now 10,000 new people are in the loop! They don't have the full picture. They don't know that this is what allows [us] to register new refugees who are even more vulnerable'.[112]

The practice of deregistration illustrates the UNHCR's biopolitical reasoning, whereby 'the constraint of the few is needed for the freedom of the many' (Rose 1999: 10, cited in Fine 2016: 254). The presumption that refugees who return to Syria are not 'real' refugees reflects the sedentary bias and methodological nationalism that permeate the UNHCR's actions. By adopting the principles of migration management and vulnerability politics, the UNHCR has

---

[111] Interview with a project officer from the NGO NABAD, Riyak (Beqaa), November 2021.
[112] Interview with a UNHCR officer, Tripoli, October 2018.

depoliticised and legitimised deregistration. This development is a direct result of shifting power that has diminished the agency's – and all humanitarian actors' – influence. As Lebanese authorities have increasingly restricted the scope of UNHCR actions, the organisation has been forced to embrace its securitised narrative.

IV. Resettlement processes: between humanitarianism and securitisation

In this section, I unpack the deployment of technologies of governance in resettlement programmes designed for Syrian refugees. Only 3% of Syrian refugees present in Lebanon have been resettled to a third country between 2011 and 2021, mainly to Canada, the UK, the US, Norway, Germany, France and Sweden.[113] Despite this numerically small figure, resettlement holds symbolic importance for the UNHCR and is highlighted in its official communications as a crucial instrument of refugee protection in the absence of prospects for integration or return. My contention is that resettlement represents a highly politicised and hybrid mode of 'humanitarian governance' (Garnier, Jubilut & Sandvik 2018: 4) that is extremely porous to political events, features an overlap of formal, informal, legal and illegal practices, and is rife with power inequalities. On the other hand, the fact that resettlement practices are conducted away from public scrutiny and are, *a priori*, based on a quantified assessment of refugee vulnerabilities, makes them particularly prone to depoliticisation. Thus, this section sheds light on how depoliticisation processes operate in a very politicised space. In addition, it highlights how humanitarian actors have to perform acts of control, providing both operational support and legitimation to the border regime.

Refugee resettlement is defined by the UNHCR as 'the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence' (UNHCR 2010). It represents one of the three long-term solutions to displacement offered by the UNHCR, along with return and integration. Resettlement is supposed to follow

---

[113]   Source: UNHCR   resettlement   data   finder,   available   at: https://rsq.unhcr.org/#_ga=2.102864384.1897062127.1664119757-1687219761.1645629638, [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

strict and formal rules; however, it is neither mandated by the 1951 Refugee Convention nor 'codified' in 'hard' international law. To compensate for this legal vacuum, the UNHCR has been particularly prolific in codifying its interpretation into 'soft' law through numerous guides and handbooks – in particular, its resettlement handbook last updated in 2011. According to the handbook, 'selection should not be based on the desire of specific actors, such as the host state, resettlement states, other partners, or UNHCR staff themselves' but should closely follow 'vulnerability criteria' put forth by the agency. (UNHCR 2011) These are the following, by decreasing order of priority: legal and/or physical protection needs, survival of violence and/or torture, lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions, women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risks, medical needs and family reunification (UNHCR 2011: 5). However, the top-down reality of resettlement has been revealed in the literature, showing that, in fact, most states assert their own separate criteria (Lindsay 2017; Garnier, Jubilut & Sandvik 2018; Welfens & Bonjour 2021). These sources reveal the entanglement of practices of care and control, vulnerability politics and securitisation, as well as gender and cultural norms. I show how these assumptions shape how power is exercised over refugees through assessments of their vulnerability and so-called 'assimilability'. A significant paradox surrounds resettlement: a high degree of formalisation exists in parallel with high degrees of opacity and unaccountability in the absence of a legally binding framework.[114] Indeed, between official directives and informal management techniques deployed by the UNHCR's protection officers and resettlement countries, there is a considerable degree of discretion.

I shed light on depoliticisation mechanisms that permeate resettlement. Indeed, resettlement comes across as a conciliatory process rather than the object of substantial political engagement or controversies (at odds with the conflictual nature of the elaboration of asylum policies), as it answers both vulnerability and security concerns presented as the result of expert knowledge. In this sense, it is embedded in 'the drive towards permanent, continually renewed, and increasingly detailed regulation' that characterises the governmentality of policing (Foucault 2007: 340, cited in Scheel & Ratfisch 2014: 18). This depoliticisation hides strong power disparities: my findings suggest that resettlement policies are inflected by complex bureaucratic procedures (with the interplay of various geographical scales and actors) and by dynamics of contestation, making these power disparities apparent.

---

[114] Resettlement represents a discretionary and opaque process from the start, with the decision on a quota being sometimes taken by the legislative branch and sometimes by the executive, where, during consultations with stakeholders, the UNHCR does not really have a say.

A) An opaque, discretionary and informal process

The academic literature on the subject underlines the discretionary power of resettlement states and the lack of accountability of their authorities and of the UNHCR towards refugees (Lindsay 2017; Garnier, Jubilut & Sandvik 2018; Welfens & Bonjour 2021).[115] In particular, in her study of resettlement in Uganda, Sandvik (2011) sheds light on a 'culture of illegality' and the extra-democratic means by which resettlement slots are allocated. In sum, 'informal, subjective bureaucratic practices and the emergence of new illegalities are […] also coconstitutive in the local implementation of transnational soft-law norms' (10). In the same vein, Garnier, Jubilut & Sandvik (2018: 36) show that 'the regularisation of resettlement has engendered a pluralist system that draws on and combines multiple sources and levels of legal and bureaucratic governance': thus, 'instead of producing the intended homogenisation, regularisation has contributed to a form of legal diversity'.

When, in 2012, resettlement slots for Syrian refugees opened for the first time in Lebanon, the context was more conducive to their reception in Western countries. The Syrian 'crisis' had received massive media coverage in Europe and part of the public expressed sympathy for the cause of Syrian refugees. More crucially, the 'crisis' was perceived as a temporary phenomenon, with the assumption that Syrians would go back to Syria at the end of the war. Thus, countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States announced resettlement quotas and required that refugees be resettled as quickly as possible. To do so, the UNHCR implemented an 'identification pilot project' in Lebanon which aimed to facilitate and accelerate the bureaucratic procedure. My interviewees from the UNHCR, the IOM and General Security described the process as rushed and sloppy, with significant gaps during credibility assessments.[116] One former UNHCR employee said that 'we were sending everyone'. She described the work environment in the following terms:

---

[115] Studies focusing on selection procedures in countries of departure are sparse; this can be explained by the opaque nature of these processes and the ensuing difficulties of securing access to the field. I overcame these difficulties by interviewing mainly former employees.
[116] Interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018; Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018, Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.

'Countries would come and say 'ok we need 300 refugees', so we would start very quickly, we weren't doing any proper exam for vulnerability, and we made a lot of mistakes. Between us, not everyone was super vulnerable. It was just to fill the quotas'.[117]

This put the UNHCR in an uncomfortable situation. In December 2014, the Australian government asked the agency to select about 2,000 refugees and to send them to Australia within a few months. UNHCR officials resorted to the accelerated procedure, but eventually Australia refused 90% of the pre-selected cases: out of 3,367 submitted by the UNHCR, only 69 were resettled.[118] The official motive stated by the national authorities was a 'lack of administrative capacities', but according to one interviewee, 'these profiles were seen as being potentially dangerous.'[119] This anecdote was repeatedly invoked to explain the UNHCR's unpopularity in Lebanon.[120]

From 2012 onwards, the number of resettled Syrian refugees kept increasing until it reached more than 18,000 in 2016.[121] As of then, the figures have dwindled to 12,000 in 2017 and 6,000 in 2021 (see annex 4). This drop can be explained by the combination of several factors. The year 2015 was marked by a shift in the perception of the Syrian 'crisis' abroad, with sudden fear that the war would not end and that refugees would stay 'forever'. Further, the terrorist attacks in Europe led to increased 'securitisation' (Bigo 2002) of refugees by creating a misguided link between refugee reception and terrorist risks. After 2015, several countries, such as Denmark, Germany, the Netherland, Finland and Australia, momentarily interrupted their programmes.[122] In the same vein, after the Nice attack on 29 October 2020, France stopped its programme for a few months. According to a UNHCR officer, the authorities 'were studying the possibility to reopen the quota' but were first 'waiting for the outcome of the next elections'.[123] In the US, right after its election, Donald Trump issued the 'Muslim ban' (Executive Order 13769 titled Protection the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the

---

[117] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.
[118] Cf. UNHCR resettlement data finder, 2015.
[119] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[120] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018, Interview with a representative from the French embassy, Beirut, October 2018.
[121] 2014 saw the first increase, with 4.903 resettled Syrian refugees. In 2015, 6.547 Syrians were resettled; and 18.279 in 2016.
[122] Interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018. This is further confirmed by the UNHCR resettlement data finder, which indicates that these countries only resettled a few refugees in 2016 or 2017.
[123] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

United States), which was in effect from January to March 2017. It suspended the US Refugee Admissions Programme and the entry of Syrian refugees; in 2018, only one refugee was resettled despite 28,000 cases submitted by the UNHCR. The American authorities left hundreds of refugee families confirmed for departure without any news from one day to another, according to my interviewees.[124]

Facing such arbitrary decisions, UNHCR power is restricted, due to its limited resources and the sensitivity of the political environment in which it intervenes. Even if the UNHCR is consulted by states on their quota decisions, my interlocutors were adamant on the fact that the agency does not really have a say.[125] Further, countries do not give proper motives to the UNHCR when they stop or resume their admissions, or even when they refuse specific cases: 'some countries give the reason to UNHCR, but most don't, and never to the refugees',[126] who cannot appeal these decisions either. UNHCR representatives hide behind the fact that 'resettlement is not a right' but 'a solution'; a discourse pounded out to the refugees:

> 'When we interviewee refugees, we try not to give them high hopes. Only a small minority will be resettled. So, we insist a lot on the fact that this is one solution among others, and not a right. We really insist on this. Managing expectation is the key word in this process.'[127]

Thus, this opaque environment, riddled with informal practices, is propitious to the intermingling of discretionary power and arbitrary practices. Between restrictive migration policies in resettlement countries and lack of integration prospects in Lebanon, the UNHCR's leeway is extremely limited.

---

124 The programme eventually resumed at the end of the year 2018, and selected families were resettled two years after.
125 Interview with a representative from the French embassy, Beirut, October 2018; interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018; interview with a representative of the Norwegian embassy, November 2018.
126 Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
127 Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

B) The externalisation of security processes to the UNHCR

In Lebanon, from 2014 onwards, the UNHCR has implemented a 'merged refugee status determination (RSD)/resettlement procedure', which was also deployed to answer the Syrian 'crisis' in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. As RSD was not deemed essential for refugee protection but is compulsory for resettlement, an extra RSD step was integrated within the process. It starts with the referral of potential candidates by partner NGOs, the resettlement team protection hotline and database, and other UNHCR units. The UNHCR first carries a short pre-screening phone interview to briefly assess the relevance of the case in light of the 'priority criteria'. Then the 'identification interview' focuses on the 'exclusion clause', which is usually the object of RSD. Finally, the 'resettlement interview' is the most time-consuming step, as is includes the 'credibility assessment'. This interview, which can 'easily last two to three hours', is extremely detailed as it aims (at least theoretically) to prove that refugees are telling the truth and can 'answer any concern we might have', according to a resettlement officer.[128] Then, resettlement countries do their own interviews and security checks, with very different formalities from one country to the other: for instance, the French government send delegations from the OFPRA; while the process is entirely handled by the respective embassy for other countries, such as Norway.[129] Finally, the IOM arranges administrative and travel logistics.

My contention is that, through this merged RSD/resettlement procedure, the selection and exclusion logics that usually permeate refugee registration have been displaced to resettlement. The UNHCR is co-opted within EU securitisation and border externalisation processes; by performing acts of control, the agency provides operational support and legitimation to the border regime. Indeed, the UNHCR has to address the 'exclusion clause' and 'credibility concerns' during refugee interviews. This explains why, according to a UNHCR assistant, 'most of the training is security-based, we are trained on fraud, documentation, Country of Origin Information…'.[130] The exclusion clause refers to the Refugee Convention, article 1F1: 'the provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that:

---

[128] Interview with a representative of UNHCR resettlement office, Beirut, November 2018.
[129] Interview with a representative of OFPRA delegation, Beirut, December 2018; interview with a representative of the Norwegian embassy, Beirut, November 2018.
[130] Interview with a representative of UNHCR resettlement office, Beirut, November 2018.

(a) he has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity, as defined in the international instruments drawn up to make provision in respect of such crimes;

(b) he has committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to his admission to that country as a refugee;

(c) he has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.'

The UNHCR has had to adapt this exclusion clause to the Syrian context. Syrian refugees are excluded from resettlement based on 'pure criminal law, related to criminal activities, aiding and abetting, being an accessory to a crime, committing the actual crime… They imagine what happened in Syria and adapt criminal law to the conflict.'[131] The UNHCR specifically considers that the following profiles should be de-prioritised during the process (UNHCR Lebanon, 'Accelerated Processing of Claims from Syria'):

- 'Military: e.g., post-March 2011, Lebanese civil war (1975–1991) involved in combat, etc., Republican Guards, Military Police, ranks of Captain onwards.

- Paramilitary/militant groups: Members of pro-government armed groups, e.g., Shabiha, People's Army, Free Syria Army (FSA), Islamic State (IS), Jabhat Al-Nusra, Muslim Brotherhood, Lebanese Hezbollah. Includes civilians engaged in armed conflict, individuals assisting combatants.

- Informants: Individuals who report political or criminal matters to the state apparatus or opposition groups (excludes persons providing information while under torture or threat of torture).

- Prisons/detention centres: Staff who work in detention facilities, including in courts, police departments, security apparatus, military, government ministries, ad hoc facilities.'

According to my interlocutors from the UNHCR resettlement team, the identification interview is in practice very much focused on 'military service, political affiliations, whether they participated in the 2011 manifestations, who controls the region they come from, who controls the security situation, whether there have been any bombings, any detention history, war injury,

---

[131] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

reasons for leaving the country'[132]… As this quote captures, the exclusion clause overlaps with potential motives of 'fear of return' and justification for individual persecution, such as military service (compulsory in Syria) and participation in the 2011 protests. Thus, an abusive extension of article 1F goes against article 1A. Resettlement countries expressively asked to avoid 'politicised' profiles – a very vague and broad term which seems to include people from militant and/or extremist groups as well as any individual who participated in the 2011 protests. Screening out refugees who have participated in these protests or done their military service is not only unfair and arbitrary; it is also counter-productive in terms of refugee protection as these profiles in particular would be arrested upon returning to Syria.

I posit that Western states' 'precautionary governance' (Bigo 2002) is externalised to the UNHCR, who become part of the border apparatus. During the first years of the 'crises', the gap between cases submitted by the UNHCR and actually resettled refugees was significant (with between 20,000 and 77,254 submitted cases, depending on the year). According to my interviewees, most were rejected by Western countries 'for security reasons'. In particular, in the United States, the security clearance by homeland security can last up to two years.[133] However, it is crucial for the UNHCR to avoid presenting refugee cases which might potentially be refused by Western countries after their own security check, because if quotas are not filled, these governments subsequently tend to reduce them.[134] To avoid such a situation, the UNHCR resettlement assistants have to anticipate any concerns or reservations resettlement states might have. This entails internalising a set of mental processes related to the securitisation of refugees which are often not congruent with their own perceptions:

> 'If there is any doubt, we ask a lot of questions to determine what the person did in relation with this doubt. Not in order to clear the person, but so that we can tell the country that will see the file, 'OK, we went through all these questions, and we got these responses''.[135]

---

[132] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[133] A lot of the cases were eventually rejected by homeland security. For instance, in 2015, for 77,254 cases submitted by UNHCR, only 20.000 were accepted.
[134] Interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018.
[135] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

According to a UNHCR employee, 'sometimes, this is overdoing things'.[136] In addition, the protracted nature of the Syrian conflict entails cases of extremely fastidious information gathering covering up to eleven years of displacement: 'When interviews started here, case workers were covering two to three years of displacement. Now, information gathering takes more time. Usually, people tend to forget stuff'. This leads to a stressful working environment, as expressed this one resettlement assistant:

> 'It is very charged, I won't lie to you, because sometimes in two hours you don't have time to know everything, to have an image of what happened to them, and you also have to be convinced by what they are telling you; because at the end, this is your name that will be on the door, and you don't want to send something with a lot of contradictions, otherwise it won't pass'.[137]

Thus, the UNHCR has to participate in this transnational system of precautionary governance, even against the will of its employees. Indeed, my interviewees displayed strong criticism towards these security biases and perceive them as sheer discrimination. For instance, the exclusion of Syrian men who did their military service was criticised:

> 'I interviewed a family with very vulnerable children, only one person in the family was working, a very vulnerable family. And we could not resettle them for one reason. The dad did his military service in a region at some point, there was something, not very serious, that could be solved, but we said no.'[138]

Another interviewee expressed confusion when I asked him whether Syrian refugees who participated in the 2011 protests were barred from resettlement: 'this should fall within freedom of expression', he said. 'But I am not sure'.[139] Therefore, these representatives of the UNHCR challenge the 'knowledge categories' established by the securitisation of migration by resettlement states.

---

[136] Interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018.
[137] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[138] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.
[139] Others explicitly said that these profiles were automatically rejected – interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

From 2015 on, the securitisation of Syrian refugees entailed screening out refugees whose histories include territories surrendered to terrorist groups such as ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra, making the line between 'politics of pity' and 'politics of risk' even blurrier. A former UNHCR resettlement assistant explained that:

> 'Before [2015], if a person had lived under ISIS, that was not a big deal. However, now they believe that those people could be hidden terrorists themselves, persons who have been brainwashed. Instead of seeing them as victims of these extremist groups, they are perceived as potential terrorists themselves. They would ask if ISIS was controlling the area, what was their reaction, what relations did they have with ISIS … They would ask 'how did you live, did you ever oppose ISIS, did you accept everything they told you'. But honestly, they did not have the choice!'[140]

Thus, after Raqqa fell under ISIS control, applicants for resettlement had to 'prove' that they opposed their rule. UNHCR caseworkers had to enquire whether they were still 'influenced' by ISIS rules; for instance, regarding the necessity of wearing conservative outfits:

> 'I interviewed a person in Gaziantep, he was educated, he studied law, he was an academic, he was married with kids, a rather advanced cultural level. He told me: me, with my educated profile, I understand; when he went to Turkey, the first months, he could not do it, he was so scared, he could not easily wear shorts. Because Daesh were forcing them to wear long clothes… It was fear. Changing this is hard!'[141]

This exemplifies the entanglement of the 'politics of pity' with the 'politics of risk'. Aradau (2004)'s analysis of discourses on human trafficking shows that presenting trafficked women as victims of psychological trauma evokes pity for their suffering which must be alleviated. At the same time, women are deemed 'risky', i.e. likely to engage in disruptive or criminal behaviour because of their trauma, which justifies surveillance and disciplinary measures. The same logic is at play here: the trauma caused by living under ISIS is conflated with the suspicion of being a terrorist. As revealed by critical scholarship on humanitarian border practices, the

---

[140] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.
[141] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, October 2018.

two logics of 'care and control' are not competing or contradictory, but co-constitutive of each other (for instance, Pallister-Wilkins 2022). In this system marked by opacity and informality, the UNHCR's room for manoeuvre is very narrow.

C) The production of apolitical subjects: favouring physical and mental suffering over political persecution

I show that selection practices in refugee resettlement involve defining hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability that are deeply grounded in medical humanitarianism (Fassin 2011) as well as religious, sexualised and gendered persecution narratives in Syria and in Lebanon. Studying resettlement thus sheds light on both the definition and construction of vulnerability in humanitarian bordering mechanisms, and how the politics of pity can become 'hijacked by a politics of risk, which is based on risk minimisation and containment' (Aradau 2004: 274).

We saw that the notion of vulnerability is a social construct giving way to arbitrary and discriminatory practices, even though it is presented as the least controversial criterion of refugee selection. This illustrates the logic of the contemporary 'humanitarian government', which corresponds to the 'deployment of moral sentiments in contemporary politics' (documented by Fassin 2011: 1) and has led to a paradigm shift in refugee policies: despite being previously perceived through the prism of political persecution, refugees are now seen through that of physical and mental suffering. Between *zoé* (or the 'biological' or 'bare' life), and *bio* (life characterized by political and social communities) identified by Agamben (1998), it is the former that has imposed itself as more legitimate than the latter. As Akoka (2020) puts it, 'the insistence on medical needs at the expense of political persecution is symptomatic of the bare life and medical humanitarianism […] who erases a moral compass based on human-rights and a political subject'. Refugee resettlement validates this paradigm shift: 'medical needs' is the first submission category for Syrians and the most sought-after by resettlement countries, followed by survival of violence and/or torture (SVT), and at the expense of legal and/or physical protection needs.[142] Thus, the emphasis is on refugee medical needs and traumas over

---

[142] Interview with a representative of UNHCR resettlement office, Beirut, November 2018.

political persecution. Even Palestinians from mixed families – who are in principle barred from the process – could be resettled if they had 'urgent medical needs'. One employee said that 'one Palestinian child needed urgent transplants, so we processed the case. It would have been inhumane not to do so'.[143] This shift from a political to a compassionate rhetoric specific to humanitarian action is depoliticising, as the ethical and moral imperative of alleviating suffering is difficult to argue with. Thus, 'political subjectivation has moved from a demand for justice to the exposure of pain' (Fassin 2011: 219).

According to this view, suffering and vulnerability are knowable, calculable and administrable objects. The use of categories of vulnerability is symptomatic of a regulative, quantified and depoliticised approach, which relies on the construction and use of labels. As Zetter (1991: 39) said, 'labels infuse the world of refugees', and labelling is also a process of stereotyping whereby clear-cut categories are standardised. These quotes from UNHCR staff illustrate such attempts to catalogue and articulate suffering:

> 'Ok, basically, let's say I have a family with SVT, women at risk and children at risk. The SVT part, it has to be alone because it kind of explains itself and shows their experience in Syria. But woman at risk and children at risk, I can merge those two under LPPN. This is where your creativity comes into play. Some information you can include in other sections.'[144]

> 'The threshold decreased. Now, it has to be severe SVT. So, if someone got shot, is a survivor of violence. Sometimes, they say this: the refugee has to have experienced violence or torture *personally*. There are also countries with a very low threshold for SVT, then it is much more flexible, a lot of cases can pass. But there some countries, for instance Switzerland, their SVT threshold is the highest, they only want people who experienced torture. For instance, if there were bombings in their neighbourhood, children who were traumatized, who still have flashback, they won't take them. Too low. They rather take torture in jail, someone has beaten him up, we killed someone in front of them … You have people who play with the threshold.'[145]

---

[143] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[144] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2021.
[145] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

This emphasis on suffering was further confirmed by interviewees from the Syrian community who underwent the resettlement process:

> 'I was asked to detail every single thing that happened in Syria, and especially anything related to the violence of the war: the bombings in my city, whether I was wounded myself, if someone in my family was wounded or died…'[146]

> 'Interviews were very much focused on my personal experience of the conflict, how I was affected, but also mentally affected, not just physically. They asked a lot of details, even things that we don't always remember.'[147]

Through the biopolitical use of categories such as 'medical needs' or 'SVT', subjects are constructed as worthy of resettlement. This illustrates the idea that 'life chances are shaped not only by 'class struggles', but also by 'classification struggles'' (Bourdieu 1979, cited in Glasman 2017: 2).

1. *Gender essentialism: men as a threat, women as vulnerable*

If these biopolitical practices of control and selection (Fassin 2011; Malkki 1995) are grounded in the definition of an apolitical subject, they are also embedded in gendered and cultural conceptions of refugees. In line with Ticktin (2006), my findings show that the politics of compassion combines 'bare' life and political life. By reifying gendered and cultural dichotomies, these politics differentiate the values of human lives in a hierarchical manner. More than an erasure, what we see is an actual redefinition of the political subject, with the materialisation of embedded 'care and control' mechanisms, through cultural, familial and gendered norms. Assessing these norms and practices serves to control the boundaries of belonging, so as to free up spots for those who are supposedly more deserving or have a greater ability to adapt.

To unpack this normative grammar, I lean on insights from gender studies, masculinity studies and the politics of intimacy (Basham & Vaughan-Williams 2013; Stachowitsch & Sachseder

---

[146] Interview with a Syrian individual, Beirut, January 2020.
[147] Interview with a Syrian individual, Beirut, November 2019.

2019; Hyndman 1996; Carpenter 2006). Only recently has the literature started to explore the gendered dimensions of bordering practices and the deeply ingrained assumption that refugee women and children are uncontroversial objects of humanitarian concern, whereas single men can be found 'at the bottom of the vulnerability priority list' (Clark 2007: 5). Critical feminist scholars of conflict and displacement trace the origin of such thinking back to the association of women and children with innocent civilians and of battle-age men with combatants, even though the majority of them also have civilian status (see for instance, Carpenter 2003).

These gendered assumptions exert regulatory effects on the behaviour of the UNHCR and resettlement states as well as constitutive effects on their language. Indeed, studies have shown that in the context of the Syrian 'crises', the assumption of women's 'vulnerability' remains (Janmyr & Mourad 2018; Sözer 2020; Turner 2021): 'women are construed as more 'true' refugees, being the victims rather than the perpetrators of war and violence' (Malkki 1995). In resettlement, gender essentialism goes through the categories of 'women at risk', referring to 'those women or girls who have protection problems particular to their gender' (UNHCR 2011); indeed, many of the women and girls who have been forcibly displaced have also been victims of rape and sexual violence, and without regular status they are increasingly vulnerable to gender-based violence as they cannot rely on local authorities for protection. A further threat to the security of young women and girls is posed by the practice of early or forced marriage. However, the UNHCR's definition of women at risk includes a 'lack of effective protection normally provided by male family members' (UNHCR 2011: 263) – thus, the UNHCR assumes that women depend specifically on *men* in their family for protection.

These entrenched gendered dichotomies have also led to the exclusion of single men from resettlement prospects. According to my interviewees, Western countries are adamant in their refusal to resettle single men, including those with severe medical cases.[148] Indeed, gendered ideology 'pushes [men] into the category of the 'perpetrator' and renders the notion of male vulnerability essentially unimaginable' (Myrttinen, Khattab & Naujoks 2017: 110). Turner has shown that these representations permeate the practices of humanitarian workers in the Syrian response. He argues that refugee men have an 'uncertain position as objects of humanitarian care', as seeing them as such would disrupt prevailing humanitarian understandings of both

---

[148] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021; Interview with a representative of UNHCR resettlement office, Beirut, November 2018; Interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018.

refugeehood as a feminised subject position and of humanitarian work as work that 'helps women' (Turner 2018, 2019 & 2021b; Carpenter 2006). A representative of the French OFPRA said that 'resettlement countries think that men can integrate a lot easier if they are single in Lebanon'.[149] Such a view speaks to 'a misperception that men face no or minimal vulnerabilities, compared with other demographic cohorts' (International Rescue Committee 2016: 3). In reality, reports have shown that many single Syrian men live in fear for their safety, due to threats they face from Lebanese authorities and the absence of legal status or work permits. An International Rescue Committee's paper reports that in 2016, 88 % of single Syrian men in Lebanon limited their movements in order to try and stay safe, especially from the police, and fewer than 10% of refugee men had received assistance in the previous month (International Rescue Committee 2016). Men, especially single men, were disproportionately likely not to be registered with the UNHCR. All of my interviewees from the UNHCR resettlement team perceived their exclusion as a deep injustice: 'this is discrimination … a guy can also be super vulnerable!'[150]

During the height of the 'European refugee crises' in 2015-2016, men's numerical predominance[151] led to their coverage in mainstream accounts as the 'protagonists' of the so-called crises, which crystallised in persistent xenophobic representations of the so-called 'threat' they would pose to Europe (Allsopp 2017). Lebanese authorities have corroborated these myths. For instance, in September 2015, Lebanese Education Mister Elias Bou Saab told UK Prime Minister David Cameron that 'one in fifty Syrian refugees entering Europe could be member of ISIS'.[152] A former caseworker said:

> 'Single men, I don't know… they are not so open with the idea. You know, a lot
> happened in Syria. The profile, if you look at the culture, which is wrong, I am not
> saying it is right, but when you look at the culture, a single man in his 30s or something,

---

[149] Interview with a French delegation from the OFPRA, Beirut, December 2019.
[150] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.
[151] To take a snapshot, in October 2015, 94,655 men claimed asylum in EU countries compared to 30,395 women, 39,710 boys and 18,635 girls (Source: Eurostat 2016). As refugee movements to Europe continue, however, it should be noted that the proportion of women is growing.
[152] Source: Alexandra Sims, '1 in 50 Syrian refugees in Europe could be an Isis jihadist, minister warns David Cameron', 15 September 2015, available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/1-in-50-syrian-refugees-in-europe-could-be-an-isis-jihadist-minister-warns-david-cameron-10501249.html [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

it is something suspicious, because usually everyone gets married very early… they think those men can be dangerous'.[153]

In her study of hegemonic masculinity, Connell (1987) reminds us that 'while it is widely recognised that masculinity, like all identities, is a fluid social and historical construct, the association of masculinity with traits including violence, aggression and dominance is seen as widespread and 'hegemonic', that is, 'propelled by ideological and cultural norms' (184, cited in Allsopp 2017: 4). European media have been portraying refugee men through this hegemonic lens as though they were necessarily associated with the violence ongoing in their country. The UNHCR has been forced to respond to these Islamophobic portrayals of Muslim Arab men as threatening and potential terrorists, rather than as victims and survivors of the conflict in Syria.

Syrian refugees who fall under the category of LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed) are recognised by most resettlement countries as a priority for resettlement, with Canada and Australia having the reputation of 'championing' LGBTI quotas.[154] Thus, according to interviewees, the only single men who are considered for resettlements are gay and transgender individuals, 'even when no violent incident happened to them',[155] in light of the persecution they would face in Syria as well as in Lebanon. Indeed, despite the prevalent perception in Western media that pre-war Syria was a 'secular and tolerant' country, article 520 of the penal code of 1949 prohibited homosexual relation, and the very few available reports indicate that LGBTI faced strong risks of harassment, violence and repression from official state actors and society, including the persistence of 'family honour' crimes (Myrttinen, Katthab & Maydaa 2017). Those risks have significantly increased during the conflict, as gay and transgender people are now targeted by the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al Nusra, and the Islamic State.[156] Thus, the 'fear of return' was taken for granted by my UNHCR interviewees. As a resettlement assistant and former caseworker based in Zahlé expressed it:

'Gay and transgender are automatically considered, even if you don't have any violent incident or something, you are automatically a candidate for resettlement, because for resettlement states, obviously it is going to be explained in the fear of return, that first

---

[153] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[154] Interview with a representative from the IOM, Beirut, October 2018.
[155] Interview with a representative of UNHCR resettlement office, Beirut, November 2018.
[156] The latter has attracted worldwide attention by filming and broadcasting public spectacles of execution of suspected homosexuals.

of all the government might persecute you if they know your sexual orientation, second of all, it is family you know, it is like a tribal system in Syria, so you have the head of the tribe which is the head of extended family, and they can do something called honor crimes, they can kill a person just because they think that this person has a negative impact on the family's image, basically.'[157]

Studies have revealed that Syrian LGBTI have experienced a 'continuum of violence' from Syria to Lebanon, despite Beirut being a relatively tolerant space in the Arab world. LGBT rights organisations have documented numerous cases of homophobic and transphobic harassment, sexual abuse and violence from Lebanese authorities and other citizens (Myrttinen, Katthab & Maydaa 2017). A UNHCR caseworker said that 'even here in Lebanon, even if it's not criminalised anymore and even if the government is not going to arrest you or persecute you in any way, your entourage is going to do it.'[158] However, some of my interlocutors considered that the level of persecution experienced in Lebanon was not sufficient, thus calling into question their position in the 'hierarchy of vulnerability' leading to resettlement. A case worker argued that 'you can be gay in Lebanon!' and further expressed her frustration: 'whoever claim to be gay is to be resettled!' She gave the specific case of one refugee who, according to her, was undeservingly resettled:

> 'I remember one case. He did not have strong resettlement needs… He lived in Iraq since 2003. He worked with the Red Cross. He was earning money, he was in Bagdad, he never had any problem with violence in Iraq, he arrived in Lebanon, nothing happened to him, but he said, 'I am gay'. That's not enough! You can be gay in Lebanon! Of course, it depends where and how you live […] And a man who had nothing, that they resettled in one month or two months. Only Christians or LGBT'.[159]

My interlocutors inferred that labelling and bordering practices encouraged refugees to manipulate their identities for favorably positioned asylum applications. They reported several stories about refugee men claiming to be gay just to find out later that they were married; women pretending that their husbands were dead, etc.: 'they know what they should say. If you were

---

[157] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[158] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[159] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.

tortured, not polygamous… If I am a victim of domestic violence, I can be resettled'.[160] Interviews thus become performative negotiations with institutions to construct 'deservingness'.

2. *Cultural essentialism: the preference for Christians and other religious minorities*

Another selection practice with discriminatory overtones is the preference for Christians and other religious minorities over Sunni Muslims. Religion is not included in UNHCR disaggregated data on resettlement; however, all my interviewees from the UNHCR, ECHO, European embassies and NGOs corroborated the existence of this faith-based discrimination. In addition, other resettlement channels such as religious missions also overwhelmingly favour Christians. These bordering practices need to be understood in a context where Muslim refugees are objectified through security problematisations. This entails both a process of subjectification (Foucault 2007) and of securitisation (Bigo 1998; Balzacq 2008; Huysman 2006; Buzan, Waever & Wilde 1998) that conflate one subject with the idea of threat. This process of 'simplification' was first described in Edward Said's seminal work on post-colonialism. He deconstructed 'Orientalist' misrepresentations of 'non-Western' categories – of people such as 'Arab' or 'Muslim' – as potentially threatening to the West. We can draw a link between this literature and the school of societal security, which showed that the perception of Islam in Europe is embedded in the idea that anything that is 'foreign' to a people (Buzan 1993) represents a threat to the identity and public security of a 'white, Christian' Europe (Fassin 2011: 112-3; Fine 2016). Selecting refugees for resettlement is not only a matter of selecting the most vulnerable; it is also about selecting the one perceived as the most assimilable or as the least likely to disrupt the national order.

The narrative of the 'persecuted Christians' underpins Western states' preference for Christian refugees and other minorities, as persecuted Christians benefit from more sympathy from the European public than persecuted Sunnis. This narrative was resisted by humanitarian actors in the field; the prevalent idea is that Christians benefitted from some level of protection from a

---

[160] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.

Syrian regime led by another minority, the Alawites.[161] This led UNHCR resettlement assistants to deem this preferential treatment unfair, as phrased by one of them:

> 'The problem with Christians to start with is that they were very close to the Syrian regime, because minorities had the power… so sometimes it is super challenging to find the fear of return for Christians […] One should not generalise, there were many Christian refugee families who were against the regime and who are in Lebanon and who cannot dare to go home, but at the same time you read that there was a lot of Christian families who were for the government'.[162]

This was further confirmed by one Syrian interviewee who told me that he was confident his religion (Sunni) 'was what prevented him from being resettled' because 'European states are more welcoming of religious minorities'.[163]

However, things have changed since 'the fear of return is now a lot more assessed towards extremist organisations rather than towards the regime'.[164] Indeed, the narrative of the persecuted Christians became prevalent with the rise of ISIS and other extremist organisations in Syria, as they have been targeting Christians and other religious minorities. In mainstream media and political discourses, the focus shifted from the victims of the regime to the victims of ISIS, identification with the latter coming across as more 'natural' for the European public. For instance, according to one UNHCR employee, Australian officials said 'they wanted Iraqi minorities that were impacted by the ISIS conflict. This is how they phrased it'.[165] Another UNHCR representative said that:

> 'Countries wanted religious minorities, yes, especially with the rise of extremist groups, they had a really hard time in Syria […] Denmark only wanted religious minorities, from 2015 until nowadays. They had a quota of 100, only for minorities, Christians, or they could also be Alawites and Chia.[166]'

---

161 The fate of Christians under Assad is a heated topic, as recent research has revealed that pre-war Syria was undergoing a deep politicisation of sectarian identities. See for instance, https://www.mei.edu/publications/bashar-al-assad-really-guardian-angel-syrias-minorities
162 Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
163 Interview with a Syrian individual, Beirut, January 2020.
164 Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.
165 Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.
166 Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.

The fact that resettlement states favour Christians was strongly opposed by most of my interviewees, one of them asserting that:

'Syrian Christians in Lebanon are not vulnerable at all! Not at all! […] they have community support, schools accept more Christians, they even find sponsors for their residencies… All Christian children go to school. Often, Syrian women tell you, we work, cleaning, organising, we earn some good money, we manage… Their children go to schools which are not public so they cost money'.[167]

She lamented that interviews involved performative negotiations in constructing narratives of persecution:

'What is unfortunate, is that people come to promote 'the victim image'. Yes, we are Kurds, we were persecuted by the government… Yes, ok, but there are many other people who were persecuted by the government… 'We were Christians'… And if you compare a Sunni family with a Christian family, you can see that the Sunni family is very unwell, she needs resettlement a lot more than the Christian family, who will be resettled automatically. 'I am Christians, I am resettled'. 'It is very sad. You have these paradigms: Kurds, Muslims, Christians, a lot of communities…'

The second bias is the idea that Christians would integrate better than Muslims as they are seen as culturally 'closer' to Western Europe, while Muslims are seen as an essential threat to European societies. This brings us to the definition of 'societal security' as coined by the Copenhagen school as the capacity for society to persist in its essential character (Buzan, Waever & Wilde 1998). As one resettlement officer puts it:

'Sometimes they say, we only want religious minorities. It is very typical. Only Christians. The Netherlands had it. Belgium had it… I don't remember about France. It is very stereotypical. I don't like this way of thinking. It can be true in certain

---

[167] Interview with a former UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, November 2018.

perspectives, but I don't like to generalise this. They assume that Christians are more open, more educated, that they will adapt better in Europe…'[168]

This trope of the educated Christian (and uneducated Muslim) was widespread during my research; in the same line, resettlement states expressed preferences for profiles deemed educated, or at least multilingual. Such bias was met with strong criticism by resettlement assistants and caseworkers, also due to the fact that some of them had faced similar discrimination while applying for student visas to Europe.[169] Once refugees are preselected, they have to attend 'training sessions' organised by delegations or embassies of resettlement states. Refugees are informed about cultural and in particular secular rules in the resettlement country with films, trainings, etc.[170] However, this step can give way to renewed bordering dynamics. France in particular has a reputation of insisting a lot on secular rules, to a point deemed 'too much' by my witnesses of the process:

> 'France insists a lot on the cultural rules in the country, the secular ones. They are going too far: they give them the impression that they won't be able to be Muslim there. I even saw cases of Syrian refugees who refused their resettlement slot to France or to Italy because they were afraid that they would not be able to live their religion freely.'[171]

The departure of Christian refugees to Western countries is also a polarising topic within the Lebanese national narrative, as the UNHCR set a precedent with the resettlement of Christian Iraqis to Europe after 2003. Indeed, demographic balance is a very sensitive issue in Lebanon due to the sectarian power-sharing system. A former General from General Security expressed a widespread assumption when she said 'this was a mistake! Lebanon also needs its Christians!', while evoking the Iraqi 'refugee crisis'.[172]

This section has revealed how resettlement practices result in the UNHCR unintentionally becoming part of the border apparatus. Resettlement is a 'borderwork' which reconfigures

---

[168] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Beirut, December 2018.
[169] Most caseworkers and resettlement assistants were in their twenties and some of them were applying for graduate programmes abroad; which also explains the high turnover rate among them.
[170] Interview with a French delegation from the OFPRA, Beirut, December 2019. Interview with a representative of the Norwegian embassy, November 2018. Interview with a representative from the French embassy, Beirut, October 2018.
[171] Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
[172] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.

mobility access around hierarchies of vulnerability, reaffirming inequality in the process. This is facilitated by the informal and discretionary aspects of these policies. If the 'deservingness' of resettlement is constructed in a depoliticised manner – through labelling and quantification of vulnerabilities – it is an authoritarian process in regard to those it seeks to govern. Peer policing and the disciplining of sexual and gender identities construct 'deserving' refugees through the cultural and gendered performance of persecution in home countries. This 'blurriness' of the decision-making has a depoliticising effect, as it can be hard to fathom who is responsible for this 'hierarchy of deservedness'; but the UNHCR is in charge of enforcing it and excluding refugees based on gendered and cultural assumptions. This case therefore provides one paradigmatic example of how securitisation dynamics are externalised to the UNHCR. It yields a better understanding of different related aspects of discretionary power and power distribution: where discursive contestation from humanitarian actors occurs, these power disparities become apparent, revealing that the UNHCR's leverage is extremely limited compared to that of resettlement states.

V. <u>A depoliticised approach to refugee return</u>

Refugee return to Syria is still a minority phenomenon: around 63.752 registered Syrian refugees returned to Syria between 2016 and 2021 according to UN estimates, a number which varies widely according to the government's estimates, amounting to 390.000 returnees (according to GSO estimates) – for 1,5 billion Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon.[173] However, since 2017 refugee return has been at the top of the political agendas and polemics.

While Lebanese politicians have been calling for rash returns, according to the UNHCR and the EU's official position the conditions for a safe return are not met in Syria; a statement corroborated by various NGOs and academic reports (for instance, Mhaissen & Hodges 2019; Içduygu & Nimer 2020).[174] Indeed, the Assad regime has come to control most parts of the

---

[173] These figures need to be balanced by the fact that Syrians were still moving to Lebanon until the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: UNHCR Syria regional refugee response, Operational data portal: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

[174] See, for instance, 'why it's far too early to talk of return for Syrian refugees', j. Crisp https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/community/2017/08/11/why-its-far-too-early-to-talk-of-return-for-syrian-refugees-2

country and clashes are still ongoing between the regime, local opposition groups and foreign powers. In the last eight years, the conflict has caused extensive damages to physical infrastructures, including water and electricity supplies, and to social infrastructures such as schools and healthcare centres, and about a third of the housing sock has been destroyed. The UNHCR estimates that over half of the country's pre-conflict population has been forcibly displaced. The enforcement of Law No.10 which could lead to expropriation, the military conscription, and the threat of state-led 'demographic engineering', are other factors emphasised by NGOs and activists to debunk the image of a 'safe Syria' spread by some media. Between the UNHCR's official position that safety and humanitarian conditions for return are not satisfactory (UNHCR, 2018a&b, 2022) and the reality of UNHCR practices on the ground, lies a significant grey zone. Indeed, the agency has become increasingly involved in the monitoring of return initiatives organised by a myriad of Lebanese state and non-state actors. In a tense context, the UNHCR and other humanitarian entities have had to navigate a narrow line between holding their human-rights approach and participating in the return 'apparatus'.

I posit that the UNHCR has adopted a depoliticised approach to return. First, this depoliticisation is embedded in a sedentary order which essentialises the link between Syrians and their nation-states, denies historical circulations between Syria and Lebanon, and envisions return as the only prospect for the refugees. Second, depoliticisation is facilitated by the fragmentation of return initiatives and decision-making in Lebanon; in this context, the UNHCR positions itself as an apolitical humanitarian actor, with a monitoring and need-based mission that I describe as a 'humanitarian performance' (Pallister-Wilkins 2022). Finally, this depoliticisation goes through the deliberate assertion that these returns are 'voluntary' and the framing of returns as a 'right' and not as a potential 'threat'. I use the term of 'state-induced return' (Koch 2014), to consider both deportations and assisted voluntary returns.

International policies of return have not been subjected to a systematic and structured academic analysis, neither treated as constituting a field in their own right. Koch (2014) has studied the UNHCR and the IOM's role in return; but such studies are sparse. Most recent research focuses on deportation policies and their overtly coercive measures (Black & Koser 1999; Bakewell 2002; Fresia 2014); a focus that tends to obscure the fact that there are more ambiguous ways in which states pursue the return of migrants – of which Lebanon provides a prime example.

The category of returnee is not mentioned in the 1951 Convention neither officially enshrined in any international legal documents. The literature has emphasised a changing paradigm, in the context of the international refugee regime's transformation from a liberal one, implementing a selective but integrative policy, to one maximising exclusion on entry, the perspective of a short stay and return. Frelick (2012) characterises this as a 'shift from an 'exilic' model' during the Cold War, where industrialised countries preferred resettlement to repatriation as a solution, to a 'source-country model' focusing on the causes of refugee flows. In a context where more and more asylum-seekers from developing countries were arriving in Western Europe, 'the notion of safe return was introduced into the discourse', occupying 'the middle ground [...] in the continuum between voluntary and involuntary repatriation' (Chimni 2004: 55). In 1980, in conclusion no.18 (XXXI), UNHCR Committee officially recognised that 'repatriation constitutes generally [...] the most appropriate solution for refugee problem' (cited in Chimni 2004; Barnett & Finnemore 2004).[175] At this stage, the UNHCR's institutional conceptualisation of the right to return was only nascent: it was framed as a non-political and humanitarian undertaking, on which assumed sovereign states had largely unfettered discretion. During the early 1990s, the emphasis shifted from the safe character of return to its 'voluntariness' (Chimni, *ibid*.). In September 1993, the UNHCR produced the *Draft Protection Guidelines on International Protection,* followed in April 1996 by the *Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection*. These guidelines indicate that repatriation should only take place at refugee freely expressed wish and carried out under conditions of absolute safety and dignity. However, they suffered from a lack of clarity when it comes to the legal standards governing the conditions under which voluntary repatriation should take place.[176] The UNHCR hinted that some kind of balancing exercise must be done by its staff between push and pull factors (Koch 2014). Later on, the UNHCR's increasing willingness to return refugees has been criticised as lowering the standards of refugee protection: the positions of the UNHCR seem to indicate a disposition on the part of the organisation to go forward with repatriation, even if conditions in the country of origin may not have sufficiently improved (Betts 2009).[177]

---

[175] The Conclusion '[stresses] that the essentially voluntary character of repatriation should always be respected' and 'called upon governments of countries of origin to provide formal guarantees for the safety of returning refugees'.

[176] According to these guidelines, the country of origin has a responsibility to 'allow its nationals to return in safety and with dignity', without any fear of harassment, discrimination, arbitrary detention, physical threat or prosecution on account of having left or remained outside the country and should provide guarantees and/ or amnesties to this effect vague too. However, close examination indicates that this seems to refer to the conditions of the repatriation operation itself, rather than the human rights situation after return (Koch 2014).

[177] For instance, the UNHCR's role in the recent repatriation of more than 500,000 Rwandese refugees from Tanzania has been sharply criticised on this point, in particular by Amnesty International. Amnesty International,

A) A depoliticised narrative: concealing the historical circulations between the two countries

As I have indicated above, the UNHCR's protection discourse and the migration management paradigm are both grounded in 'methodological nationalism', i.e. a system of representation that considers the nation-state to be a natural social and political entity of the modern world (Wimmer & Schiller 2002; Malkki 1995). There is a sedentary bias in the very concept of refugee, which implicitly suggests that people belong to a particular location as if by nature. In this order, the separation of people from their place of origin constitutes a deviance, which is thus resolved with the restoration of a person to this place through repatriation, presented as the optimum solution. This sedentary bias leads to the assumption that once displaced have returned, they will no longer need or want to migrate (Long 2009). This perspective is structurally limiting to apprehend empirical patterns of migration. First, it overlooks the fact that migration represents an essential livelihood strategy that is not necessarily symptomatic of a problem. Second, it denies the returnee the possibility of ongoing connections to the country of former refuge: this sedentary bias has led to the historic assumption that continued mobility on the part of refugees and former refugees represents a failure of the integration or reintegration process (Long 2009). Thus, Koch (2014: 16) 'proposes attention to returnee transnationalisms as an important productive direction for future study of return.[178]

I argue that this sedentary framework permeates the UNHCR's narrative surrounding refugee return to Lebanon. The UNHCR surveys on 'refugee plans to go back' in four host countries[179] are embedded in the idea that return is the ultimate prospect: they emphasise that 'voluntary repatriation in safety and with dignity remains the preferred durable solution for Syrian refugees'. A chart reveals that the number of Syrian refugees hoping to return has increased, from half of them in 2017 to 75% from 2018 onwards.[180] In Lebanon specifically, this amounts to 86% of Syrians – however, only a limited percentage consider returning in the close future.

---

which had documented alarming levels of human rights abuse in Rwanda, declared that the UNHCR 'played down' the reports and 'condoned the mass *refoulement* of refugees'.

[178] For example, Marion Fresia (2014) highlighted continued migration of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal, 15 years after exile, and specifically the migration of men and youth to cities in Senegal and elsewhere in Western Africa. When the border to Mauritania re-opened, they continued to cross the border back to Mauritania, 'as they had done before' to contribute to meeting the survival needs of their families (*ibid*., p. 448).

[179] UNHCR's Region Perception and Intention Surveys (RPIS) of Syrian refugees on their future intentions': 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

[180] However, the majority do not intend to return in the next twelve months (5,8 % in the four countries in 2019).

In addition, the UNHCR's narrative erases the history of circulation and labour mobility between Lebanon and Syria. In communication and reports, this history is not mentioned, neither is the category of temporary workers, though they constitute most of the Syrian population before the war. This perspective is further entrenched by the UNHCR's definition of the cessation status, i.e. 're-availment to the country of origin'. Following this logic, the UNHCR monitors Syrians returning to Syria and strip them from their refugee status, excluding them from the UN system. This logic fails to grasp the specificities of the Syrian mobility regime and the plethora of cases involved beyond the UNHCR clear-cut categories: for instance, migrant workers fleeing the war, Syrians who returned to check on their homes and finally had to go back to Lebanon due to destructions and/or the economic and safety conditions, Syrians who were already making a livelihood in Lebanon before the war … Ultimately, the UNHCR's policies – in the same vein as governmental policies – have had the effect of illegalising displacements. After 2016, Syrian refugees have increasingly had to resort to smugglers to go back and forth between the two countries; and after 2020, it became almost impossible for them to come back to Lebanon once they'd left the country. The view that Syrians who go back and forth between Lebanon and Syria are not 'legitimate' refugees is widespread in the Lebanese administration. This rant from a representative of the Customs expresses such prejudice:

> 'They go back to Syria and then come back to Lebanon, they work and they also get money from the UN, 100 dollars … A refugee is not supposed to work, and to go back and come back! Come on, these are not refugees. If you go back, you cannot come back! Or you are not a refugee anymore!'[181]

This quote adheres to methodological nationalism, which essentialises the distinction between 'refugees' and 'migrant workers'. A representative of the ICRC based in Tripoli expressed the fact that the UNHCR's current frameworks do not grasp the complexity of Syrian circulations in Lebanon:

> 'Border circulation is a normal process that has always been in place. It is not new. Before, all the major economies in the Akkar were based on these exchanges. And now, you still have people moving back and forth [...] They just decided to go back to Syria.

---

[181] Interview with a representative of the Lebanese maritime Customs, Beirut, November 2018.

And they don't want to be excluded from the UN system. We need to read what is behind the numbers of returns: these are absolutely irrelevant, they do not grasp the trend about what is really happening'.[182]

Thus, the simplistic narrative of refugees being able to go 'home' is too often given without a critical analysis of what they conceive to be home and how it has changed since they were forced to leave. There is a striking contrast between the discourse of external agencies, who perceive repatriation as a return to normality, and the reality of these returns as they have been documented by several NGO reports.

B) The UNHCR's monitoring role and the fragmentation of return initiatives

My second argument is that depoliticisation is made easier by the fragmentation of return initiatives and decision-making in Lebanon; in this context, the UNHCR has positioned itself as an apolitical and humanitarian actor in charge of monitoring convoys and catering for the refugees' needs. As soon as the Assad regime seemed to have gained the upper hand in Syria's war, political executives rushed to call for the return of Syrian refugees, in Lebanon as in other host countries: the 'politicisation, to different degrees, of the return question [has] led to the growing acceptance of repatriation as a solution' (Içduygu & Nimer 2020: 1). Recent studies have documented a shift in governing returns, from the Lebanese state as the sole decision-maker to the dispersion of authority within a plethora of competing structures (Fakhoury 2020; Fakhoury & Stel 2021; Mhaissen & Hodges 2019). Indeed, from 2017 onwards, various state and non-state actors have rushed to devise return initiatives. Some political parties such as the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah have established return committees, the latter setting up a whole programme with contact centres and task forces across the country. The Lebanese state has created an official channel for Syrians to apply for voluntary returns, coordinated by the General Security Offices and religious authorities have also encouraged such initiatives. The GSO has opened 17 registration centres spread across Lebanon, allowing Syrians to apply for return via the five border crossings, pending the Syrian government's decision on their applications. It is frequent for the Syrian regime to reject these applications:

---

[182] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Tripoli, January 2019.

'The GSO has an open relation with the Syrian regime. They send them the list of refugees, and the regime will respond with those accepted and not accepted [...] we do not understand the motives. The first operation for return, during last summer [2018], 3000 Syrians applied and only 500 got accepted. Only 370 ended up returning'.[183]

Finally, UNHCR reported 39,000 self-organised refugee returns to Syria between 2016 and 2019. However, reports have revealed that these returns remain out of line with safety conditionalities, voluntariness and dignity (Mhaissen & Hodges 2019).

Political representatives have drawn on refugee return as a bargaining leverage for sustaining geostrategic alliances in the context of Syria's conflict. Actors aligned with the pro-Syrian Alliance, such as Hezbollah, Amal and the Free Patriotic Movement, have called on the Lebanese government to normalise its ties with the Syrian regime and coordinate closely with Damascus to facilitate returns. President Aoun voiced this position for the first time in 2017 when he stated in the UN General Assembly that he believed returns should occur as early as possible. Then, during the Arabic Economic and Social Development Summit held in Beirut in January 2019, the President encouraged the 'safe return of displaced Syrians' which 'should not be linked to a political solution in Syria'. Conversely, key actors affiliated with the March 14th Alliance have generally opposed normalising ties with the Syrian regime; and advocated voluntary returns through mediation from international agencies. The quote below from a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Persons captures this 'political constellation' (Fakhoury 2021: 164):

'There is no common line' … Officials activities only restarted recently, after the elections, since we had no cabinet. And there is strong political divergence on how to look at the issue. All political parties want them to go back home. But some would say that we cannot be held accountable on this because we do not have the capacity to guarantee their safety, so we need an international umbrella such as the UNHCR; and others say we are not going to wait for an international umbrella to facilitate returns,

---

[183] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, 30 November 2018.

because the international community is expecting and putting criteria that were not even existing in Syria before the crisis. So that would lead to Syrians never returning.'[184]

By shifting governance from central state institutions to a proliferation of actors, the host state has enabled a set of nebulous practices that have pressured refugees into the so-called 'voluntary returns'. The pluralisation of sites of authority has blurred responsibilities and obscured accountability over return conditions, while shifting the blame away from state actors. Thus, the UNHCR has not been able to coordinate with a centralised body to push for a rights-based return agenda (Fakhoury 2018; Janmyr 2017). Neither did the agency benefit from the political support of Western countries: despite their rights-based rhetoric on returns, the EU and its Member States have shown a form of *de facto* non-engagement on the issue (Stel 2020), avoiding entanglement with the divisive topics thwarting refugee stay and prompting their return, and shying away from publicly formulating clearer conditionalities on rash returns (Fakhoury 2021).

If the UNHCR has agreed with Lebanon on return as the most desirable and feasible durable solution to forced displacement, it has also warned against all return operations, noting that conditions in Syria are still not conducive to return and that returns must be voluntary and take place in safety and dignity. Thus, the agency has opposed any attempt at organising plans for returns, such as the 2020 national return plan put forth by the Lebanese government and the Russian plan. This position has provoked clashes with Gebran Bassil, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has publicly accused the UNHCR of having a 'hidden agenda' of keeping refugees in Lebanon (see Chapter four). Between its international standards and the fragmentation of return initiatives on the ground, the UNHCR has had to position itself so as to remain relevant without undermining its humanitarian identity. I posit that the agency has done so by presenting its role in return operations as purely humanitarian or technical. From the end of 2017, the UNHCR has been monitoring convoys going back to Syria, assessing refugee needs and providing them with medical care and documentation such as birth certificates, in cooperation

---

184 Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018. More recently, Lebanon's former Prime Minister Hassan Diab used the 2021 Brussels Conference as a platform to call on the international community to support its national return plan for Syrian refugees (European Union 2021). They have called on the EU to divert its financial aid to Syria to incentivise refugees to return and to refrain from encouraging unwelcome refugee stay in Lebanon.

with the Lebanese Red Cross, the ICRC and UNRWA,[185] also present at the five official border crossings. At the beginning of these organised returns, GSO has granted the UNHCR the permission to check the list of returnees 24 hours before their departure, so as to reach out to these individuals and assess their needs before their departure.[186] An important justification for the UNHCR and other humanitarian entities is to assert their role as purely humanitarian, administrative, and informed by human-rights considerations. They claim that this 'monitoring' allows them to verify that returns are voluntary.[187] They also claim being apolitical stating that, by limiting themselves to monitoring convoys and catering for refugees' needs, they don't encroach upon the sovereignty of Lebanon. In particular, they do not engage in data-gathering, as this has been expressly prohibited by the government. A representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office described their mission in those terms:

> 'From 5 AM every morning, the UNHCR is on the ground, interviewing refugees to identify their needs, providing documentation, birth certificates, medical aid with the Lebanese Red Cross. We take care of protection, of monitoring, of the legal side. We are the only continued presence on the field [...] When we are aware of someone who wants to return, either individually or as an organisation by General Security, we would like to speak to them, we do a short interview; so we speak with the person to see if this is their decision, their choice, to check that they are not forced against their will, and we also ask if they need something, if they have papers in order, any medical needs, if they need advanced medication...'.[188]

To justify this approach, UNHCR representatives resorted to ambiguous formulations: 'this is all very political, so we don't provide assistance to return'[189], 'we are not involved, we don't participate in returns but we respect refugee choices'[190]... These statements were corroborated by a representative of the ICRC: 'we are on the field, even if we are not supporting the returns

---

[185] Palestinian Refugees from Syria who wish to return to Syria need to go through the Palestinian embassy. Then, UNRWA monitor their departure, in liaison with the GSO. Interview with a representative of UNRWA, October 2018, Beirut.
[186] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[187] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, zoom, March 2021; interview with a UNHCR officer, Zahle, December 2018.
[188] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, September 2018.
[189] Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, zoom, March 2021.
[190] Interview with a UNHCR officer, Zahle, December 2018.

as such [...] we check that they have everything they need but we don't want to be more involved than that'.[191] These ambiguities were dismissed by depoliticised formulations:

> 'In the context of Syria, our position is that if a refugee today or yesterday decides that now they would like to return to their home in Syria, we respect that, we do not contest that or object to that, but we want to make sure it is their own decisions, and they don't return as a result of coercion or forced return … We respect individual returns; we support individuals who decide to return. However, we are not organising or facilitating repatriation. So, we are not inviting refugees to register for returns and we do not organise logistics. Because there we do not consider that the conditions are there to return yet.'[192]

However, this depoliticised mandate has proved impossible to fulfil, from an empirical point of view: the UNHCR cannot assess whether some returns are forced or not; a fact corroborated by several of my interviewees from different organisations. A delegate from the ICRC asserted that:

> 'Yes, we try to monitor whether they are forced return, but how do you interpret forced? Until now, we have not seen any forced return *manu military,* but this is something we keep following [...] However, we have seen push factors: measures from authorities to push them to return, closing GSO office, mass arrests, threats to demolish camps…'

A representative of the EU delegation in Syria said that:

> 'UNHCR cannot tell is those returns are forced or not. Even if they say the contrary. It is impossible to tell as they don't have access in Syria, or a very limited access to regime-held territories. And even in Lebanon, they are not aware of everything that is happening'.[193]

---

[191] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.
[192] Interview with a UNHCR officer, Zahle, December 2018.
[193] Interview with a representative of ECHO-Syria, Beirut, September 2018.

In addition, in Syria, the UNHCR (as well as the EU and the ICRC) lose access to convoys as they are not granted access to most territories, neither are they allowed by Damascus to gather data:

> 'We do not have any clear pictures on what is the situation for these people, back to Syria: how many of them found their house, how many of them found their relatives, shelters, what are risks of protection, do they have been arrested, prosecuted, obliged to be enrolled in military services and so on and so on'.[194]

The secrecy surrounding UNHCR monitoring return operations is a strong indicator of its politicisation. A 'UNHCR office for returns' based in the Beqaa was set-up in 2018 with a representative, but it does not have official status; and NGOs have denounced a 'vacuum of reliable information' and the fact that the UNHCR is not transparent about its mandate and activities.[195] UNHCR's ambiguity has drawn criticism from grass-roots humanitarian actors and human-rights organisations. The risk of such approach has been emphasised as compromising their human-rights positions:

> 'If you want to keep doing concession, ok, but say that you are doing concessions. 'We stand at the border; we see people returning but we cannot do anything'. But you cannot appear in a documentary of France 24 with people with UN badges at the border, and when we ask if those returns are voluntary or not you tell us that we cannot know. Don't go to the border then [...] You are giving legitimacy to the regime because whatever will happen people will eventually say, 'no, we had UN staff here'. What is somebody get there in Syria and get tortured. Lebanon is a signatory of the UN convention. So basically, it is a violation of non-refoulement. Don't reach the level of being suspected of an international crime against humanity.'[196]

UNHCR officials actively withdraw from politics, by framing their work as humanitarian care without acknowledging its effect on the normalisation of return operations and the structural violence that underpins them. UNHCR's ambiguity legitimises the overarching return objectives of the Lebanese government, and is involved in norm-building regarding the

---

[194] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Tripoli, January 2019.
[195] Interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[196] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese CSO, Beirut, October 2021.

acceptability of state-induced returns. This provides a prime example of how international actors can support states in upholding control over the standards regarding treatment of their refugee population and in reaching their migration control objectives, thereby contributing to reinforcing state sovereignty in the governance of migration.

C) Insistence on voluntariness and refugee 'self-reliance'

Lastly, the depoliticisation of returns goes through the UNHCR's assertion of their 'voluntary' character (even when such voluntariness is not empirically proven) and, more broadly, of refugee individual choices and self-reliance. This is depoliticising, as it creates a narrative where the future of refugees depends mostly on themselves; and conceals the structural and political factors preventing or prompting such returns. As I indicated above, the voluntary character of return is the cornerstone of the UNHCR's promotion of repatriation as a preferred solution. However, the conceptualisation of this notion is incomplete. A first bias is that it assumes that a refugee volunteers to repatriate only if his or her life or freedom are not in danger upon return and if he or she no longer fears persecution. In reality, studies have shown that voluntary repatriation takes place when the situation in the country of origin has not yet abated. Second, the criteria that the UNHCR has put forward to assess whether repatriation truly fulfils the condition of voluntariness is too vague and not applicable, according to legal experts (Koch 2014). This flawed conceptualisation has had consequences emphasised by the literature: such as, the UNHCR accepting voluntary returns when conditions are not safe; and turning a blind eye to situations where the line between forced and voluntary returns is porous. In Lebanon, the research has revealed that when refugees return 'spontaneously' it has often more to do with the sorry state of protection in Lebanon than conditions improving at home (Mhaissen & Hodges 2019).

The UNHCR surveys on Syrian refugees intentions to return are a striking example of discursive depoliticisation of this issue, as they aim to 'place refugee voices at the centre of discussion and planning on their future' (UNHCR 2021b: 2). Several formulations emphasise the importance of their ability to choose for themselves, thus framing return as a right rather than as a threat: 'refugees should be considered the best judge of when they can return in safety and dignity. It is vital that the international community listens to them and respect their choices'

(UNHCR 2019b: 11), the 'UNHCR firmly believes in listening to refugee men, women, girls, and boys, and being guided by their hopes, intentions, and choices when it comes to securing durable solutions' (UNHCR 2021b: 2) … A representative of the UNHCR told me that 'our current position is, if they want to go home, they go home',[197] while a protection officer said:

> 'Our position remains that refugees have the right to independently, freely, take themselves a free and informed decision when and whether to return. Returns should be voluntary, in dignity, it is important not only because these are the standards in international law, but because we know from experience that when refugees decide themselves that now is it safe for them to return, it is more likely to be a more sustainable return, a permanent return, and not something temporary where they realise it was not possible and they have to flee again…'[198]

UNHCR reports stress that 'voluntary return in safety and dignity [is a] fundamental right of refugees [and] support to their right must be enhanced' (UNHCR 2021b: 3). Thus, 'the international community must depoliticise these discussions and support the ability of Syrian refugees thus helping them to make free and informed decisions about their future' (*ibid*.). These reports also use storytelling, such as the story of 'Abo Mohammad, 63 years old, who has recently returned with his family members to Syria to re-plant their land' (UNHCR 2022b: 9). Neutral vehicles such as storytelling are depoliticising because they do not carry a direct political message but tell the story of an individual case.

This rhetoric was also present during my exchanges with Lebanese officials. According to a representative of the MoSA: 'our position is that if refugees today or yesterday decide that now they would like to return to their home in Syria, we respect that, we do not contest that or object to that'.[199] In this view, the voluntariness of refugee return is a key argument legitimising return initiatives: 'UNHCR has ensured us that these returns were voluntary [...] so their organisation is legitimate',[200] told me an officer from the MoSDP. A representative of the MoSA said that 'returns are personal choices [...] and we respect personal choices'.[201]

---

197 Interview with a UNHCR resettlement assistant, Zahlé, October 2021.
198 Interview with a UNHCR protection officer, zoom, March 2021.
199 Interview with a representative of the MoSA, Beirut, December 2019.
200 Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.
201 Interview with a representative of the MoSA, Beirut, December 2019.

These narratives give the impression that the key issue in repatriation is not the objective situation to which the refugee is returning, but the subjective will of the refugee. This is deeply depoliticising because it conceals the structural factors, such as the Syrian regime's atrocities as well as the push factor in Lebanon and lack of international solidarity in the reception of refugees. The UNHCR never explicitly blame the Syrian regime; its violations of human-rights and its atrocities are toned down as mere 'obstacles to remove' or 'concerns for security, livelihoods, access to shelter and basic services', that should be removed through 'collective efforts' (UNHCR 2021b: 3). The deleterious Law 10 is alluded to as 'lack of adequate housing and concerns over my property' (*ibid*.: 4). Likewise, the role of push factors is undermined as 'pressure': 'the prevailing situation in host countries does not seem to act as a strong motivation factor' (*ibid*.: 5). These narratives fail to recognise the structures that prevent refugees from returning or force them to return.

Conclusion:

This chapter has described the nuances of UNHCR depoliticisation. My contention is that depoliticisation is essential to UNHCR interventions because it enables the agency to approach politically charged issues, under the guise of neutrality, from a technical and humanitarian angle. I show that, through the intertwining of unequal mobility regimes and humanitarian action, UNHCR is brought into the border control assemblage; ultimately, 'the humanitarian reason is, therefore, a way of exercising power in the modern world through normative concerns of care and instrumental concerns of control that come to structure responses as distinctly humanitarian' (Pallister-Wilkins 2022: 45).

First, I have shown that depoliticisation goes through the technicisation of UNHCR relations with a state perceived as 'weak' and absent: to legitimise its interventions, the agency has established a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, fragmentation, and a country perpetually in crisis. The depoliticisation of the relations between UNHCR and Lebanon also entails the promotion of a narrative of good cooperation between the international donor community and the host state, smoothing out disagreements.

Second, I have unraveled UNHCR's logics of action embedded within technocratic distancing, its neutrality claims and vulnerability politics. This depoliticised narrative also operates by drawing an essential demarcation between the inherently technical and the inherently political, despite the evidence of blurred boundaries between expertise and politics.

Then, I have shown how these logics of action permeate UNHCR policies related to Syrian mobility. The first ones are refugee registration and deregistration, processes largely informed by filtering and exclusionary mechanisms. The second one is 'resettlement', a 'humanitarian borderwork' which reconfigures mobility access around hierarchies of vulnerability, reaffirming inequality in the process. This case provides one paradigmatic example of how securitisation dynamics are externalised to the UNHCR. Finally, the UNHCR has adopted a depoliticised approach to return, embedded in a sedentary order which essentialises the link between Syrians and their nation-states, and in the assertion of UNHCR as a neutral facilitator and return as a voluntary process – a right rather than a threat. The next chapter will examine another crucial aspect of international interventions: European externalisation and border management policies.

Chapter three: Lebanon's border regime: European externalisation and border management policies

In this chapter, I unravel international border interventions in the framework of the Syrian response. I focus on the border between Lebanon and Syria – a porous space strongly impacted by the war – and on the maritime border with Cyprus,[202] as it is in these fluid borderlands that the European efforts to bolster Lebanon's security forces have been concentrated, driven by strategic concerns, territorial control and counter-migration. I turn to the problematisation of Lebanon's border governance by foreign actors through a process of securitisation and the deployment of a paradigm of migration management, and their effects on Syrian mobility. The Lebanon-Syria border underwent drastic changes from porousness and a regime of free movement to strict closure and controls with, in 2014, the implementation of eleven restrictive visa categories for Syrian refugees.[203] Such changes have ignited a tension with the UNHCR's protection agenda. In addition, they have entrenched the categorisation of displaced Syrians, including the dichotomy between migrant worker and refugee. I investigate the role of foreign actors and in particular of the ICMPD in this paradigm shift.

I draw on the literature on Security Studies, Critical Border Studies, the externalisation of European borders and migratory policies, and the diffusion of a paradigm of migration management. These studies conceive of borders as transnational, heterogeneous assemblages of actors, tactics, practices, technologies and knowledges, and unearth 'bordering processes': borders are no longer considered fixed entities but rather as fluid and dynamic social constructs that result from power struggles. The literature highlights the disciplining dynamic in which Southern countries of intervention internalise the norms of well-governed migration promoted by EU countries (Geiger & Pecoud 2013). In particular, IOs have an epistemic role in shaping dominant assumptions about migration and borders (Betts 2011). Measures that facilitated the

---

[202] I will leave out of my analysis the borderland with Israel, which has only been marginally affected by the Syrian crisis.

[203] These include tourism, business visit, property owner, tenant, student, travelling to another country, medical visits, appointment with a foreign embassy, pledge of responsibility (sponsorship, including for work), displaced – which fits best the category of refugee but is given only under exceptional circumstances. Source: UNHCR, 'Entry procedures for Syrians in Lebanon', 2020, available at: https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/uploads/poster/poster_149865898340.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

externalisation of control mechanisms in North and sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe (Lavenex 2002; Anderson & Bolt 2011) and Turkey (Fine 2016), which were usually conditional on financial support or agreements facilitating visa issuance for these countries, have allowed the European Union to transform into a veritable 'fortress' with closed external borders (Lacroix 2016). The underlying rationale is closely connected to state-building efforts, as good governance is associated with well-managed borders – both to control and to protect, two of the most fundamental prerogatives of states.

This chapter makes an original contribution due to the specificities of the Lebanese case, as a case of border policy externalisation in the relatively unexplored Eastern Mediterranean. Contrary to most aforementioned examples, Lebanon does not border Europe and is not accessible by direct overland route, but it is included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Crucially, migrant flows from Lebanon do not represent an immediate 'threat' to Europe, and the maritime border with Cyprus was not, at least until 2020, a focus of attention for the international community, as very few boats had left the coastline for the island country located 175 km away. Foreign boats can arrive and exit through three corridors in Lebanon: the ports of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon. For travellers, Cyprus is only reachable legally by air.

However, I posit that an externalisation logic prevails, with the idea of Syrian arrivals in the European imaginary – not actual arrivals – playing a role in border interventions. The securitisation of Syrian refugees is part of a broader process of 'dangerization' (Andersson 2022: 40) of Lebanon by the international community, and of ensuing support in the fields of counterterrorism and assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

This chapter thus sheds light on externalisation dynamics and the role of capacity-building interventions in countries with no (or very limited) migration flows towards Europe. Funds for security cooperation were mainly allocated to reinforcement of the land border with Syria, the provision of infrastructure, control equipment, and training for the Lebanese army, enabling it to undertake border police missions, as well as to improve security at Beirut airport and the Port of Tripoli. The implementation of a pragmatic and neoliberal management rationality at Lebanon's borders is a strongly depoliticising process as it denies the porousness and hybridity of the existing border assemblage. Furthermore, it implies the application of a rationale of migration management to a situation of humanitarian emergency, which conflicts with the UNHCR's protection agenda. I identify another contradiction, between the paradigm of

securitisation and the paradigm of migration management, as the latter strives to move away from constructions of migration as a security threat to states, towards the core proposition that all states can benefit from migration if it is managed in an orderly and technical manner. However, both the EU and the GoL, through their discourses and practices, have placed migration on a security *continuum*, interweaving it with threats from transnational criminal groups and terrorism (Huysman 2000; Bigo 1994).

The growing role of the ICMPD in border management outside of Europe reflects a trend towards depoliticisation of global governance, with the fragmentation of policy decisions among a plethora of global actors. As mentioned in the introduction and Chapter two, both states and IOs are important in developing new tactics and tools to depoliticise global governance issues (Stone 2017). Depoliticisation involves delegation of power and decision-making from state institutions to international organisations, which is 'reflective of the birth of new 'arenas' of power, authority, and decision-making beyond the nation state' [...] and of a depoliticisation discourse that 'seeks to portray certain issues as beyond the control of national politicians' (Finders & Buller 2005: 299, cited in Stone 2017: 95). The 'scientisation' of global governance symptomatic of depoliticisation (Stone, *ibid.*: 185) falls in line with the promotion of the ICMPD authority in border management. Littoz-Monnet (2017) has shown the role of knowledge utilisation by international bureaucracy to inform and guide policy, legitimise action, substantiate policy positions, minimise institutional insecurity and depoliticise action.

In short, I posit that the ICMPD's interventions have supported and sharpened a shift in the rationale followed by the Lebanese government. Recent studies have shed light on bordering processes and their impact on Lebanon's sovereignty and the role of the Lebanese Army (Tholens 2017; Mouawad 2018; Jagarnathsingh 2019). In particular, Tholens (2017) has highlighted the lack of political engagement from Lebanese security actors. My approach is different: I study these policies' role in the diffusion of a paradigm of migration management and their embeddedness in a European externalisation agenda. I highlight the entanglement between these bordering processes and a migration management rationale, and its impact on Syrian mobility. This way, I add empirical evidence to externalisation and bordering processes in the Middle East.

My main argument is that the ICMPD technicises Lebanon's border assemblage by framing it as a symptom of state weakness and lack of sovereignty, and not as the result of historical cross-

border circulations. This technical interpretation is a form of depoliticisation since it fixes issues in a context of technical deficiencies and regulations while avoiding putting them into politics. The fact that the ICMPD supports a state-driven model makes this diagnosis of state weakness all the more crucial for the legitimatisation of its interventions: the ICMPD needs a state to act upon.

In the first section, I point to the prevalence of externalisation logics, discourses and frames in European interventions: Lebanon has been constructed by the international community as a security problem, a 'dangerized' place prone to foreign interventions. In addition, it is embedded in a European agenda of externalisation of migratory controls, as the assumption of potential spillover and Syrian arrivals largely infuses discourses legitimising border interventions.

In the second section, I show that the ICMPD asserts epistemic authority through its positioning as a depoliticised actor who provides assistance to Lebanon in the form of material support, capacity-building, the dissemination of best practices and evidence-based policy development. I argue that European security professionals have provided a technical 'problematisation' of Lebanon's border and security assemblage, interpreted as symptomatic of unfinished state-building, state weakness and sectarian divides. Such analysis denies the historical reality of Syrian circulations and porosity of the border. Meanwhile, it lays the basis for the ICMPD's interventions, putting forth its need-based and technocratic solutions: the Integrated Border Management approach (IBM) is presented as a way to overcome sectarian patterns of rule. In this scenario, the ICMPD is a neutral actor which brings together a plethora of actors and yields a common understanding around border issues and migration. In the end, through pedagogy and consensus-building, the IO promotes a vision that is deeply infused by a situated and Eurocentric understanding of migration management.

Then, I draw attention to the diffusion of the paradigm of migration management, with its selective, orderly and neoliberal ordeal, at odds with the paradigm of refugee protection defended by the UNHCR. I argue that this paradigm has been accepted and even instrumentalised by Lebanese state officials for their own benefits, in order to legitimise their policy of increased control. These findings highlight subtle power dynamics between migration IOs and Southern recipients of funds – in contradiction with a mere top-down approach –

showing how IOs support the personal agenda of recipients. In particular, the distinction between refugee and migrant, the illegalisation of displacement, and the sedentary bias were invoked by the Lebanese security authorities to legitimise their own agenda of containment. I end this section by showing that ultimately, the Lebanese authorities overt securitisation of the Syrian mobility nuances or even conflicts with the paradigm of migration management.

Finally, I shed light on specific mechanisms of depoliticisation mobilised by the ICMPD. First, it aligns itself with a humanitarian border rationality underpinned by the entrenchment of dynamics of care and control, and deploys a human rights rhetoric with dominant state narrative of securitisation addressing the smugglers as the main culprits. The ICMPD also promotes a bottom-up approach enhancing the role of local communities in bordering processes, an apparent empowerment of local actors that is depoliticising as it conceals power structures. Through these micro-practices, the ICMPD gains legitimacy and gives the illusion that border management work 'for the benefit of all' (the Syrian population, the Lebanese government and host society) while concealing the circumstances of the war in Syria.

I. The prevalence of externalisation logics, discourses and frames in European interventions

In this section, after giving a brief account of Lebanon's 'border assemblage' characterised by hybrid sovereignties, I point to the prevalence of externalisation logics, discourses and frames: Lebanon has been constructed by the international community as a security problem, a 'dangerized' place prone to foreign interventions. Security threats overlap with migratory concerns: Lebanon is embedded in a European agenda of externalisation of migratory controls, as the idea of potential spillover and Syrian arrivals largely permeates discourses legitimising border interventions. I draw on securitisation theories which call into question the view that security threats are simply an objective entity, and hold instead that they are constituted through an intersubjective process that reveals security to be a political technology. In particular, I use the Copenhagen School's discursive conception (Buzan 1993), according to which society security has taken over state security and became the most effective tool for understanding the new security agenda. Discursive securitisation is thus primarily the work of elites, whose

authority and structural position of power are such that the audience receives both their discourse and their worldview as valid.

The Syrian war has prompted significant transformations in the way the Lebanese periphery relates to the core: the Eastern border, historically porous, has increasingly come to be seen as a militarised buffer between the war in Syria and the relative calm of Lebanon. Following the terminology employed by Wilson & Donnan (1998: 4, 7 & 21, cited in Picard 2016: 327), this border shifted from being a 'periphery', loosely connected to both Beirut and Damascus, to being a 'boundary', a strong demarcation between two countries.

A) Towards a new conception of the border: hybrid sovereignties and security assemblage

In the first chapter, I shed light on Lebanon's border as a 'quasi-border' (Picard 2016), a 'security assemblage' (Tholens 2017) with patterns of porousness and hybrid sovereignty defying conventional expectations grounded in the nation-state. Instead of apprehending the porosity of these borders as inherently symptomatic of the 'weakness' of the state, Picard (2016: 334-335) invites to a new conception of border sovereignty, 'a broader understanding of domestic agency [that] successfully rectify the 'weak' state or deficit perspectives' and to 'challenge the exclusive legitimate authority of the political power and the formation of a hierarchised political community'. This falls in line with Tholens (2017) and Mouawad (2018)'s works which invites us to grasp these borderlands through the prism of 'hybrid sovereignties' and local belongings. In this view, classical analyses are blind to transborder dynamics and to the nature of the relationship between Lebanon and Syria because they are 'lost' between the Westphalian principle of separation between states and the blurred reality of the field. Therefore, pre-established ideas of border and sovereignties do not enable to grasp the complexities of this borderland.

To approach the complex web of state and non-state actors in charge of managing the Lebanon-Syria border and the maritime border with Cyprus, I draw on the concept of 'global security assemblage', which provides a lens to analyse how a 'range of different security agents and normativities interact, cooperate and compete, to produce new institutions, practices and forms of security governance' with overlapping power and sovereignties (Sassen 2008; cited in Tholens 2017: 867). Indeed, 'global-local assemblage' in which the global enters into the local

in ways that defy conceptions of sovereign power are increasingly at the forefront of research on post-national practices (Tholens *ibid*.: 869; Abrahamsen & Williams 2009).

In Lebanon, different entities are responsible for border management and migration, with little to no coordination between them. Their tasks have been clarified by the National Defence Law of 1983 for military affairs, which established the Higher Defence Council. The General Directorate of General Security (GSO) might be the most relevant entity when it comes to border management, as this intelligence agency is in charge of the legal entry, residence, and exit of foreigners in Lebanon and of the movement of people across the five land border crossing points (BCPs) with Syria (on the Syrian side, these BCPs are controlled by Hezbollah and the Syrian regime) as well in the airport and seaports. The GSO issues passports, visas and residence permits and monitors violations of migration legislation. It is also responsible for the control of foreign people on Lebanese territory, for ensuring the state's internal security, countering activities deemed to be subversive, and conducing counter-intelligence duties. It has large discretionary authority to take punitive actions in their fight against anything that can jeopardise security, such as arrest, detention, or deportation (Lebanon Support 2018). Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the GSO enforced new immigration controls at the Syrian border which effectively made it impossible for Syrian refugees to obtain or renew a legal status.

At the BCPs, the Custom administration is also present, responsible for controlling and taxing goods passing through land, sea and air crossing points, and clearing people. Some of General Security's prerogatives thus overlap with those of the Customs. As detailed in section three of this chapter, the political support for this institution is limited, its reputation being tarnished by repeated accusations of being corrupted and in need of reform.

Between official BCPs is deployed the Lebanese Army, officially in charge of monitoring and managing these borderlands. According to general consensus, the Lebanese Army, which chairs the Border Control Committee, suffers from weakness due to decades of neglect in Lebanese military development and persistent attempts by sectarian factions to regulate its internal dynamics or hinder its development. 'The LAF have historically been loosely structured, poorly equipped and politically divided, and in some parts of the country, notably in Hezbollah-controlled areas as well as along the Syrian border, are considered to amount to nothing more than an expeditionary force in their own country' (Tholens 2017: 871). However, recent

scholarship argues that 'it gradually established its position as an institution trusted by a substantial cross-section of society in post-Syria Lebanon' (Salloukh et al. 2016: 109), partly due to its multi-sectarian composition, a source of military legitimacy and public trust. In the borderlands, its role is hindered by Hezbollah's control of significant portions of these territories, also subject to significant Syrian intrusions. The LAF also plays a role in the maritime border with Cyprus, in liaison with UNIFIL. Indeed, since July 2007 (following the Israeli attacks), the UN mission has been in charge of the surveillance of the coast, with episodic support from bilateral donors.

The role of the Internal Security Forces (ISF, the national police force) in bordering processes is limited; their presence in the vicinity of some border areas purports to counter crimes notably trafficking of people and goods. Their association with the Future Movement has rendered them too politically marginal to gain widespread support in society.

Apart from these state actors, a number of non-state actors have played a political and security role in these 'soft borders' subject to political leaderships' competition. They include clans and tribes, religious figures, patronage networks, powerful families and Islamist groups, in areas where 'tribal links and cross-border exchanges have rendered non-state governance models resilient and durable' (Picard, 2016: 335). In some locations of Akkar and Hermel-Baalbeck such as Wadi Khaled or Bar Elias, the informal sector amounts to 99% of the economy. The most prominent non-state actor is Hezbollah: its political and military control and its involvement in Syria have contributed to its hegemony in these transborder zones (Mouawad, 2018 & 2015), where it organises the bulk of cross-border movements and smuggling, thanks to its presence on both sides of the border.[204]

Regarding the maritime border, since July 2007, following the Israeli attacks, the UNIFIL has been in charge of the surveillance of the coast, with episodic support from bilateral donors. The Patrol of the Lebanese Army is also in charge of this surveillance, and from 2017 onwards, its role has been growing with the stated objective of, ultimately, taking over full maritime surveillance. The UNIFIL's role is perceived as being embedded in a broader strategy of control of crossborder movements:

---

[204] In addition, the Hezbollah has been reported to play a key role in countering infiltration from Syria-based extremist groups such as the Islamic States and the al-Nusra front, notably in Ras Baalbek and Arsaal.

'Maritime surveillance is far from UNIFIL's original mandate. But it means that they have an observation post. They can track movements. They did not start because the Lebanese government asked them to: it was the international community's demand. Their mandate is to control maritime access so Hezbollah doesn't get weapons from the boats. They have the duty to guard the Lebanese border under resolution 1701. They have radars and they control boats coming to Hezbollah, but they can also control other movements.'[205]

During the first phase of the IMB project, strategic interest for the maritime border was still residual. Even though in 2015, at the height of the 'refugee crisis', a few boats irregularly left Lebanon, no boat departure was reported in the following two years. Interviewees agreed in saying that the pressure or motivation from donors to push for international maritime cooperation was non-existent.[206] At the end of the year 2018, the EU had not initiated any kind of action to dismantle smuggler networks in Tripoli, nor to prevent or counter irregular departure by sea, etc.[207]

An ICMPD expressed this lack of interest in September 2018:

'I was at the Cyprus embassy last week, talking about the increase in small boats that are going across the ocean. I go over there and I read the news, but the figures they are talking about are in the ten rather than in the million... It is something happening and it's growing but it's anywhere near epidemic. In reality, more important things need to be done before starting to do something about a small boat.'[208]

'Surveillance assemblage' refers to the interplay, interdependence, and competition between security actors, all operating in a complex mode of action. In the Lebanese case, communication and cooperation between these state and non-state actors is weak to non-existent and there is significant overlap in their activities – for instance between the Customs and GSO at land BCPs, or between UNIFUL and the Lebanese Patrols at sea. According to the classical analysis, the

---

[205] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[206] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[207] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[208] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, January 2019.

sectarian elite keeps these institutions weak to serve as arenas for contestation between its competing members (Salloukh et al. 2016: 109, 130). In this politically divided landscape, foreign support for border management would be likely to exacerbate the complexity inherent to this assemblage: such support is perceived as a struggle for power by proxy actors, with in particular support to the Army seen as attempts at eroding Hezbollah's hegemony and ultimately countering Iranian influence.

B) Politics of fear: the 'dangerization' of Lebanon by the international community

In his recent book *No Go World*, Andersson (2022) critically examines the clustering of threats by Western governments that ultimately draws 'maps of fear' key to foreign interventions but which does not correspond to the actual level of threat. Critical Security Studies have revealed Orientalist tropes that animate perceived cultural differences between East and Western, Christian and Muslim to pursue a securitisation agenda (for instance, Bigo 2002; Fine 2016). I posit that Lebanon is a 'dangerized' place (Andersson, *ibid*.) rather than a dangerous one: international security professionals, diplomatic actors, etc., have mapped out a 'threat cluster' defined by overlapping dangers in which different threats (terrorism, transnational crimes and spillovers from the Syrian conflict) nest within others, thus generating and sharpening a generalised sense of danger and a concomitant need to intervene. This 'dangerization' is perceptible in most Western foreign travel advisories: for instance, the French one strongly advises against going to North Lebanon, the Beqaa (including Baalbek and Anjar) and South Lebanon, all areas coloured in a deep red, while Tripoli is smeared with orange, which signifies advice against all but essential travel.[209] Therefore, red zones include Hezbollah strongholds – the military branch of Hezbollah being considered a terrorist organisation by Western countries – as well as Palestinian camps and Sunni-majority areas in North Lebanon, prone to fear of 'radicalisation'. American risk protocols go much further, as the travel advisory overall recommends to 'reconsider travel to Lebanon due to crime, terrorism, armed conflict, civil

---

[209] Source: French MFA website, available at: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs/conseils-par-pays-destination/liban/

unrest, kidnapping and Beirut Embassy's limited capacity to provide support to U.S. citizens'.[210]

Travel advisory, French MFA. Source: MFA website.

Lebanon's borderland is particularly securitised: its porosity and hybridity are perceived by international actors as symptomatic of a lack of governance prone to violence. In a 2021 report, the ICMPD calls a 'ticking bomb' (14) the border areas in Akkar and Mount-Hermel due to their informal economy and the power of clan affiliations, political groups, Hezbollah, that nuance or even interfere with that of official representatives of the state such as the LAF or the ISF (ICMPD 2021). Akkar is even labelled as being 'on the brink of a social collapse': 'the borders have always been porous, but the current economic crisis and the involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian War have rendered conflict in border areas a matter of national and regional significance' (7). International professionals contribute to this construction: most UN agencies are not able to access the map's red zones without a prior three-day notification (a measure sometimes imposed on them by the LAF, however). Therefore, 'it is in these fluid borderlands that the efforts to bolster Lebanon's security forces are concentrated, driven by at

---

[210] Source: US embassy website, available at: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Lebanon.html [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

least three external strategic concerns, and the accompanying global discourses: territorial control, counter-migration and migration pressures' (Tholens 2017: 872).

However, this securitisation should be nuanced: Lebanon occupies an ambiguous place in the Western imaginary, for its image as a bridge between Orient and Occident and its rich cultural life – all of which makes it an attractive destination for tourists and international professionals, and these travel warnings have remained partly ignored, at least until 2020. However, the framing by a variety of international power and actors (ranging from Brussels and European bureaucrats to UN and security professionals) of this country as 'dangerous' lays the ground for foreign interventions and security assistance. In February 2020, an EU security officer told me they were in the process of supporting the GoL in drafting a counter-terrorism strategy:

> 'Just before the revolution happened, last fall, we held talks with the GoL for a counter-terrorism dialogue, we tried to draft a strategy reflecting the consequences of the Syrian crisis. The DG HOME was trying to support Lebanese authorities in drafting this strategy, but it was suspended with the protests. Lebanon is a major partner in this fight against counterterrorism and radicalisation. We have a programme against online radicalisation in Jordan, we want the same for Lebanon.'[211]

He added that, in the end:

> 'For Lebanon, the focus is not so much about migration than about security, because of the security situation in the country and the Syrian crisis. Our cooperation with Lebanon is embedded in a wider strategy about fighting global terrorism, which includes the negotiations for sharing of personal data.'

---

[211] Interview with a security officer from the European Commission, February 2020.

C) Renewed impetus to security assistance: a *migration-security* nexus

The Syrian war gave renewed impetus to security assistance and in particular support for the Army, perceived by both the GoL and the international community as a beachhead against the expansion of ISIS and JAN at the border, and as a cornerstone to defend Lebanon's sovereignty and mark the return of 'the most salient face of the Lebanese state' in abandoned areas (Salloukh et al. 2016: 131-132). For the first time, a consensus was reached within the Lebanese political class to deploy the LAF along the border and formulate a path towards military development, as illustrated in one of the national priorities of 2015 (3): 'containing the effects of the Syrian crisis [...] creating a real-world security and border regime along the Lebanon-Syria border'. The LAF began marking its presence along main border points in 2014, setting up two land border regiments along the frontier with 1300 men, and engaging in defensive military operations against external threat for the first time in the postwar area (132). In total, since 2012, the international community has spent more than two billion USD in security assistance, most of it in capacity-building, training, equipment and financing for the Lebanese Army.[212] The bulk of the money was spent in 'SSR, antiterrorism assistance, foreign military financing, narcotic control, law enforcement, transnational crime, conventional weapons destruction, air support, and border security assistance'. In addition, during the Rome II Conference held in 2018, EU commitments reached 50 million USD for security assistance.[213]

The interweaving of migration and security permeates the whole EU-Lebanon framework relations. The Copenhagen and the Paris schools have revealed how the EU has 'constructed' the theme of 'immigration invasion' as a central fear that both structures contemporary societies and justifies security responses (Bigo 1998; Guild 2009; Huysman 2000); a fear articulated around the themes of criminality, concerns for the balance of the labour market or the spectre of Islamic terrorism. Therefore, 'when a political discourse sees only enmity, uses (for security

---

[212] Security Assistance Monitor, 'Security Aid Pivot Table – Programs', Website, Security Assistance Monitor, 2012-2021, available at: http://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Lebanon [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

[213] Sources: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Rome II Ministerial Meeting to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/41450_en [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
Interview with a representative of EEAS, Brussels, February 2020.

purposes) the most diverse statistical tools to materialise the adversary, and invokes (with varying degrees of relevance) relations between these large structures, their long processes and the reasons for the necessary 'securitisation' of immigration, it is defining a policy of control over flows, controlled integration, and surveillance of mentalities and attitudes. This means that, moved by a 'rhetoric of jeopardy' it has become a discourse of 'securitisation' that advocates exceptional solutions [...] The discourse securitising immigration is thus in a position of symbolic force and becomes a political technology, a modality of contemporary governmentality' (Bigo 1998: 4).

Andersson (2022) summarises the migration-security *momentum* in Europe in 2015: 'the year when the global 'refugee crisis' knocked on Europe's doors, migration was about to become the most infectious political issue across the Union […]. After initial panic in European capitals, a blanket security response soon ensued, cost what it might in financial or human terms. This mass investment, in turn, led to some notable 'successes' in containing people behind the borders' (Andersson 2019: 144; see also Lacroix 2016 on the 2011-2015 migration 'crisis'). This migration-security nexus figures prominently in the EU-Lebanon agenda: European Neighbourhood Policy documents focus primarily on terrorist threats and migration and funds to support Syria neighbours in hosting refugees such as the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis (the Madad Fund) were supplemented by projects to tackle illegal migration (European Commission 2015). In addition, the year 2016, at the height of the 'refugee crisis' in Europe, spurred a surge in security assistance to Lebanon with 317 millions USD spent mainly in border security and counterterrorism.

The securitisation of Syrian refugees seen as potential terrorists was striking during this research. For instance, a representative of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) acknowledged that:

> 'The reason why it was relatively easy to leverage funding and to get both the donor community and the Lebanese government to agree on a strategy for the education of Syrian kids was 'because everyone wanted to avoid an army of terrorists growing on Lebanese soil.'[214]

---

[214] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Beirut, September 2019.

These words echo those of a representative of the MosDP: 'they [donors and the GoL] all wanted to make sure that this would not lead to extremism, a generation in Syria that doesn't have the capacity to rebuild the country.'[215]

A recurrent word in interviews associated with Lebanon was that of 'stability'. Despite its multiple crises, it is perceived as an enclave of stability and neutrality in a region troubled by conflicts, earning it a reputation as a 'Switzerland of the Middle-East':

> 'It is in the interest of the international community that Lebanon remains stable. Because they don't want that [...] all Syrians and Palestinians and everyone find a way to leave for Europe. So, this is what maintains Lebanon's stability [...]. Europeans have a vested interest in reinforcing service capacities, at ports, at border posts, because it can limit departures, detect fake passports. Because Europeans are convinced that Lebanon can be used by foreign fighters.'[216]

An EU security officer voiced the same idea when he said that:

> 'Lebanon is a safe haven, as Jordan in the Middle East. Sure, there are some irregular crossings from the maritime border, but this is residual. These countries ensure stability in a region with many security problems, between Syria, Israel and the Palestinian territories, Iran…'.[217]

In the same vein, a French diplomat argued that 'our diplomatic efforts are an essential ingredient for Lebanon's stability'.[218] An officer from DG NEAR said that: 'during meetings, all the country delegates intervene a lot because for them, the stability of Lebanon is on top of the agenda'.[219]

---

[215] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.
[216] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[217] Interview with a representative of the Directorate-General in charge of migration and home affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission, February 2020.
[218] Interview with a representative of the French MFA, Paris, February 2020.
[219] Interview with a representative of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) of the European Commission, Brussels, February 2020.

C) A Eurocentric rationale of externalisation and securitisation

In this section, I point to the prevalence of externalisation logics, discourses and frames in European interventions. The idea of potential spillovers and Syrian arrivals play a crucial role in border interventions and largely infuses the discourses legitimising them. I point at evidence and occurrences of 'perceptual' (or 'mental') mapping of migratory risk – which often, do not correspond to any empirical reality. In other words, the conception that Syrians eventually want to go to Europe largely infuses discourses and actions, despite the absence of threat of flows from Lebanon to Europe. Lebanon is thus categorised as a 'transit' country – a key categorisation in the geography of global maps of danger.

The conviction that Syrian refugees eventually aim to go to Europe is omnipresent in the words of interviewees from the international community. For instance, about the cooperation between Lebanon and Europol in terms of data sharing, a project manager of the ICMPD said that:

> 'It is not about making Lebanon part of the EU … It is more about making it work for Lebanon in this landscape. It is more about acknowledging that the vast majority of the traffic will come from the Middle East towards Europe. And Lebanon is doing a good job at stopping undesirables to get to Europe. The police is giving more and more access to its information system, we have good cooperation from the ISF, the GSO…'.[220]

It is not clear here whether the 'undesirables' refer to refugees, potential terrorists, or to returning foreign fighters. In the same vein, another representative of the IMCPD argued that: 'Syrian refugees here, they all want to go to Europe … Soon, we will be faced with the same problem in Europe as they have in Lebanon.'[221] These quotes illustrate a process of securitisation whereby a discursive object is transformed into a threat (Balzacq 2005), a process that 'involves appealing to and protecting an imagined, homogeneous community from the outsider' (Buzan 1993: 5). They evoke the image of a threatening mass passing through Lebanon as they head towards Europe. This highlights the relevance of Austin's speech act

---

[220] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[221] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, December 2018.

theory (1962), according to which labelling a problem as an existential threat can legitimise certain political practices.

In this context, development and humanitarian aid – for both Syrian refugees and the host society – is framed as being part of a wider security strategy aimed to prevent Syrian refugees from arriving. A representative from the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME) said that:

> 'We use the Madad Fund to make conditions more sustainable, more livable in Lebanon, easier for the refugees but also for the host community. The goal is to prevent Syrian arrivals to Europe. But we should be more proactive and not just reactive'.[222]

In policy documents, Lebanon is depicted in a Eurocentric manner as a 'transit migration' country as in this ICMPD report: 'Lebanon holds a strategic location in the Mediterranean region, and its position contributes to making it simultaneously a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking' (ICMPD 2013: 17). The specific meaning European officials impute to the term 'transit country' tends to be Eurocentric in the sense that it assumes that migration – here between Syria and Lebanon – was necessarily on its way towards the EU. Transit migration is used to refer to the migration of citizens from distant countries who cross several other countries before they arrive at the external borders of and finally in the EU. Düvell (2012) has examined the political context and discourses that brought about this concept in the 1990s, showing how it was intrinsically tied to political motivations with the diffusion of policies of migration and border externalisation. Düvell comes to the conclusion that the politicised nature of the discourse and concept of transit migration severely impedes scientific dealing with this phenomenon, despite its frequent use by EU governments and the UN. He shows that 'the way it is applied by supranational, international and intergovernmental organisations is often grossly simplified and misleading' (416)[223] and eventually 'became a discursive frame and a code for 'illegal immigration'' (417). In particular, the IOM has played a key role in pushing this word into global policy arena, giving it apparent expert validation.

---

[222] Interview with a representative of the Directorate-General in charge of DG HOME, Brussels, February 2020.
[223] Düvell shows the lack of empirical validity of the concept. Indeed, 'the countries which experience migrants travelling through and/or temporarily staying on their territory can hardly be labelled 'transit countries' as it is usually other forms of migration – immigration and/or emigration – that characterises the experience of these countries and determine their function within the global migration order' (2012: 423).

The following quotes, respectively from representatives of the ICRC, the European Commission and the ICMPD, capture this conception of Lebanon as a transit country:

'There was a trend that was quite strong at the beginning of the conflict, Lebanon was a transit place, Syrian migrants transitioned through Lebanon. You might have a few more cases now, but it's not the trend anymore, because a lot of them left at the beginning, in 2011, 2012, 2013. Now, they settle in Lebanon. After the policy of the EU became much stricter, it became much more complicated for them to pass through the Mediterranean.'[224]

'At the EU in Brussels, we take care of the West side, the maritime border with Cyprus. With FRONTEX, there is a project for the whole MENA, including Lebanon, the migration issue from the sea perspective to prevent arrivals, essentially of Syrians. I think Syrians want to go to Europe, but they don't try now, because after Cyprus where would they go? Turkey? Cyprus is not appealing; you cannot go any further than that … Information circulates between them, so they know this.'[225]

'The Syrians, they won't stop in Cyprus or Greece, they want to go to Germany, because social aids are unconditional, unlike in France.'[226]

As Pecoud (2020: 16) noted, 'transit migration conveys the idea that neighbouring transit countries needed support to address irregular migration, silencing the role of the EU in tighter border controls played in transforming these spaces into transit regions', and triggering the 'imperative of pre-emption in space and time'.

In the same vein, the two following quotes, respectively from a French diplomat and a representative of the European External Action Service (EEAS) based in Brussels, claim that what triggers their diplomatic endeavours with Lebanon is the motivation to avoid a potential movement of migrants towards Europe:

---

[224] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Tripoli, December 2018.
[225] Interview with a representative of the Directorate-General in charge of DG HOME, Brussels, February 2020.
[226] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, October 2021

'France has two priorities: preventing Lebanon from entering any regional crisis; and the dissociation policy with the Syrian conflict. Of course, there are different motives for this, but one is to avoid having a refugee crisis in our hand. This is where we centre our diplomatic efforts.'[227]

'Now, our strategy is to reshuffle the Madad Fund to allocate more money to the vulnerable Lebanese population, and to keep the same level of support for the Syrians … We want to respond to the economic crisis and support economic growth, the private sector, protection, in our new action plan for 2020. We want to avoid a migration crisis.'[228]

An official from ECHO based in Lebanon insisted that Syrian refugees are depicted as an 'existential threat' for EU citizens:

'EU civilians are afraid of this 'existential threat', so there is a need to show Europeans that refugees are fine here, that they won't come to Europe. But how to do this? That is where the UN comes into the game. The role of the UN, of the UNHCR, here, are in the interest of donors […] The donors are overall pushing for their interests back home. When we found the little Alan Kurdi on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, our funding got from 45 million to 90 million overnight! And we had only three weeks to contract new people here.'[229]

The fact that the budget of the ECHO office in Beirut doubled the day after the dead body of Syrian boy Alan Kurdi was found on a Turkish beach and made headlines around the globe epitomises the close correlation between the prevalence of the 'refugee crisis' in the European imaginary and externalisation policies. According to Securitisation Theory, when an issue is successfully labelled as an existential threat to the survival of a reference object, this legitimises 'exceptional practices' to respond to the so-called threat.

However, fear of Syrian refugees leaving for Europe lacks sound empirical grounding: even though many have gone to Europe, most of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon want to go back to

---

[227] interview with a representative of the French MFA, Paris, February 2020.
[228] Interview with a representative of EEAS, Brussels, February 2020.
[229] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.

Syria eventually, as revealed by many studies (cf. surveys on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return mentioned in chapter two). There is even less evidence linking their presence to international security threats. Critical scholars argue that the transit migration category, an unreliable descriptor for the study of migration patterns, serves to legitimise the EU's efforts to contain 'undesirable' migration in neighbouring countries through the externalisation of its borders (Düvell 2012; Hess 2010; Walters 2015). Lebanese officials also participate in the securitisation of Syrian refugees going to Europe, following the same discursive logic:

> 'European countries did not learn anything. I am from an older generation. I was there when Germany, Denmark, took all the Palestinians, Australia was taking the Sunni from Tripoli. They had problems because all the people they selected were confirmed radical Islamist. Most of them came back and now, they are foreign fighters in Syria. In 2006, I was in charge of the evacuation. I saw boats leaving. Europe has a big problem […] They have to take people who integrate. They need workforce, but they need to select people who can integrate, who can live like Europeans. They have a category that will never integrate. They will always live in isolated ghettos, as if they were in their country of origin.'[230]

This quote captures the identity-related anxieties that the Copenhagen school of Security Studies deems emblematic of contemporary societies and which focus on society's ability to 'persist in its essential character': 'if it is societies that are the central focus of this new security problematic, then it is issues of identity and migration that drive the underlying perceptions of threats and vulnerabilities' (Buzan 1993: 5). The argument that 'refugees will never integrate' echoes Fine (2016)'s study on bordering processes in Turkey, where she foregrounds the connectivity between orientalist reasoning and these underlying perceptions.[231]

However, the fact that there is (or was, until 2020) a general awareness that there is no direct threat of migration from Lebanon, especially by the sea, nuances such process of 'dangerization'. For the EU, the usual step to further cooperation with countries that represent a migration 'threat' is the conclusion of a 'mobility partnership' as it provides a framework of

---

[230] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018
[231] In chapter four on repoliticisation, I show how the assumption of migration towards Europe is being 'weaponised' by Lebanese authority for their own advantage.

permanent cooperation, and crucially, allows to envision readmission and visa facilitation agreement. In 2014, the EU has concluded mobility partnerships with Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan (signed in 2014), all countries part of the ENP. Further evidence of Lebanon not being on top of the migration agenda lies in the fact that negotiations for the conclusion of such partnership, started in 2014, are still ongoing, with the last round of talks occurring in 2016. A new round was supposed to start in October 2019 but was delayed until further notice due to the protests. In February 2020, a security advisor from the DG Home affairs of the EC based in Brussels said:

> 'We are not pressuring on the EU side: why would we? There is no threat coming from Lebanon on this level, no migration flux. Nothing pressing. See: in six years, nothing evolved. We reached out to them [the Lebanese authorities] to resume the negotiations just before the protests started, but now, due to the situation, it is in pause. There is no EU engagement for the mobility partnership because it is not like there is a lot of criminality or threats coming from Lebanon […] What the partnership would allow is to provide a framework of permanent cooperation. With Jordan for instance, it enables to consider readmission and visa facilitation agreements. In the idea of getting, later, to a visa-free region. But they are nowhere near that yet.'[232]

The cooperation with Cyprus in terms of border management is limited to information-sharing between British, Cypriot and Lebanese Customs and study visits of the Lebanese Custom Administration to delineate the borderline.[233] An agreement between the Government of Cyprus and the GoL on the readmission of persons without unauthorised stay was signed in 2002. However, it has never been fully operationalised.

---

232 Interview with a representative of DG HOME, Brussels, February 2020.
233 Source: interviews with representatives of the Lebanese Customs, Beirut December 2018; January 2020.

II. The ICMPD's interventions: a technical interpretation of Lebanon's border and security assemblage and the promotion of depoliticised expertise

In this section, I turn to the deployment of ICMPD interventions. The ICMPD, an organisation acting with the clear aim of pushing for the Europeanisation of migration policies and management (Georgi 2010), occupies a discreet yet prevalent role among the dozens of international organisations operating in Lebanon. It has established itself as the main one in the field of border management at the expense of the IOM. Its manifold interventions are embedded within the EU-funded Integrated Border Management (IBM) project underway since 2012, which aims to address significant gaps in the Lebanese security system. In addition, most European and North American embassy undertake bilateral security assistance.

In this section, I examine the practices and rationalisation techniques of the ICMPD's mode of governance: the organisation interprets the border as a problematic of governance that is rendered subject to foreign intervention, including the deployment of a set of technologies, resources, and institutional arrangements. I show that the ICMPD asserts epistemic authority through its positioning as a depoliticised actor who provides material support, capacity-building, the dissemination of best practices and evidence-based policy development. I argue that European security professionals disseminate a technical 'problematisation' of Lebanon's border and security assemblage, interpreted as symptomatic of a weak and unfinished nation-state plagued by sectarian divisions. Such interpretation denies the historical circulations between Lebanon and Syria and the border's porosity. It lays the basis for international interventions, as the IBM approach is presented as a solution to overcome sectarian patterns of rule. In this scenario, the ICMPD is a neutral actor bringing all stakeholders together to foster a common understanding around border issues through material and symbolic support. This falls in line with Miller & Rose's comment on the neutral expert positioning of IGOs: 'Experts hold out the hope that problems of regulation can remove themselves from the disputed terrain of politics and relocate on the tranquil yet seductive terrain of truth' (Miller & Rose 2008: 69). However, through pedagogy, socialisation and consensus-building, the IO promotes a vision that is deeply infused by a European and situated understanding of migration management.

A) The institutionalisation of the ICMPD as a facilitator of European migration management

The ICMPD describes itself as 'an international organisation which strives for comprehensive, sustainable and future-oriented migration governance. It does so based on solid evidence and in partnership along with all relevant stakeholders at national, regional and international level.'[234] Its activities fall under the banner of migration management, a regulative approach of steering migration in a highly selective manner on a global scale (Georgi 2010; Pecoud 2011). The notion of migration management was popularised by IOs active in the migration field, in particular the IOM, as a way of bringing under a single umbrella their wide range of activities and the multiple objectives they pursue. I draw on Geiger & Pecoud (2020: 15)'s definition of migration management: first, it entails a description of migrants as a global issue that must be globally addressed through international cooperation. Second, a pragmatic appreciation of migration as a normal process that should benefit sending and receiving countries as well as migrants. Third, it conveys an aspiration to well-managed or orderly migration flows, as opposed to unauthorised migration. Fourth, it establishes linkages between migration and other policy fields, such as security or development. And finally, it claims its adherence to universal principles, including human rights and free markets. The paradigm of migration management is entrenched in a neoliberal project based on a spectrum of new actors such as IOs, NGOs and the private sector, and on new forms of political practices, drawing on the privatisation and informalisation of politics. It gained prominence in the context of tougher national legislation, prompting states to formulate the need for enhanced cooperation to control, exchange information and react rapidly.

In this policy landscape, the ICMPD is much smaller than the IOM or the UNHCR, but it has still managed to impose itself on the global scale. This Vienna-based organisation was funded in 1993, and is now composed of eleven member states and around sixty staff members at its headquarters. A 'European migration-related political organisation' (Georgi 2010), it describes

---

[234] Source : ICMPD website.

itself as a 'leading consultancy organisation in migration'.[235] It gained prominence during the 1990s by playing a role in the adoption of EU migratory policies in the process leading to EU membership before expanding geographically.

Research concerning the involvement of IOs in migration politics has been conducted with a focus on Europe, but a growing body of literature speaks to their role in migration politics and control in countries outside this continent (Geiger & Pecoud 2010 & 2014; Georgi 2010; Hess 2010; Loescher 2001). This burgeoning field of research is divided between a prevailing assumption that these organisations do what they are mandated to do by their donors, and a critical scholarship foregrounding their political leverage and influence.

This research thus contributes to a better understanding of the globalisation of migration management by shedding light on the role of the ICMPD – an organisation still understudied – in the Near East. The few existing works on the ICMPD have emphasised its role as the 'spearhead of Fortress Europe' (Düvell 2002; Hess 2010; Georgi 2010), reflecting the shift within the European migration regime over the last twenty years towards migration management. Georgi (2010) has come to the conclusion that the 'political significance' of the ICMPD lies predominantly in its political influence in the field of combatting irregular migration by means of informal policy advice and its role in the strengthening of the EU's external border in the context. Through an ethnographic analysis of the Budapest Process and the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit, Hess (2010) also points to this informality and its knowledge-based mode of governance. She describes the ICMPD as a 'border-militarising agency' (102). In sum, the ICMPD is perceived as a strongly depoliticising actor, an undemocratic and technocratic institution, epitomising the unconstitutional violation of the separation of power and bypassing of parliamentary control.

Hall (2015) distinguishes 'mandate-driven IOs' such as the UNHCR and 'functional IOs' such as the ICMPD and the IOM. The ICMPD is crossed by a tension between its technical nature and its embeddedness in a political environment dominated by Western states and their objective to involve non-EU governments in control migration. The ICMPD's activities are

---

[235] According to its former director general Jonas Widgren, the ICMPD raison d'être from the start was 'strengthening the regulative capacities of the EU states and pushing for the Europeanization of migration policies' (Widgren 2002; Georgi 2010).

financed on the basis of projects heavily fundraised at the country level.[236] Therefore, the ICMPD's mode of financing, lack of clear-cut mandate and operational flexibility have led it to follow donor interests more closely than the UNHCR does. This donor-driven nature makes it a 'subcontractor' and 'transmitter' (diffusing norms from one country to another) rather than a 'counterweight' to donor states, according to the categories put forth by Lavenex (2002).

B) The inception of the ICMPD's interventions in Lebanon

In 2005, Syrian troops left Lebanon following Hariri's assassination, and in 2006 the Lebanese territory was under Israeli attacks – a 34-day military conflict believed to have killed 1,300 Lebanese people. An ICMPD officer recounted this watershed moment which prompted international attention to Lebanon's border security:

'After Hariri assassination and the departure of the Syrian forces, there was an awakening regarding borders. The Syrians left. The international community had to help Lebanon take better control of its borders. So we started to propose ideas.'[237]

Border security assistance was authorised under UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (11 August 2006), calling upon the international community 'to support the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognised border'. This context brought together the USA and EU Member States willing to unify their border management activities, which prompted the signature of the IBM project mandating the ICMPD in 2008.[238] Its proclaimed aim was twofold, in line with a rationality of migration management: first, facilitating trade and the travelling of legitimate travellers; and second, facilitating coordination between security actors. It was expected to start in 2011, but the Syrian war held it off for a year and a half. In this climate of uncertainty, the ICMPD displayed strong operational adaptability, while developing a long-term vision:

---

[237] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, November 2018.
[238] In the early 2000s, a few EU Member States implemented projects but they did not prove sustainable.

'With the huge influx through crossing points, we decided to rethink entirely the project… We thought that it was urgent to tackle the problem of crossing points and we kept in mind the aim to try to do some kind of long-term, fundamental reform. Our work is not limited to the crisis situation. Honestly, everyone thought it would be like Tunisia for instance, or Egypt, an overthrown and then democracy. But it didn't. So we had to think long-term. How to deal with this influx? We were quite insecure about everything, but we kept going. An operation started in the month of February of that year and carried on ever since: we have been able to expand what we do, and expand the partners… And I think also manage to a large extent to help the coordination.'[239]

In Beirut, the small ICMPD office, comprising a dozen employees, is located in the Adliyeh district, steps from the office of the GSO, and not far from the ISF, the MoSA and other key Lebanese administrations. This location stands out from that of other IOs such as the UNHCR, the UNRWA and the IOM, located in Jnah, near the refugee camps. The ICMPD thus benefits from a direct link to key security institutions in line with its image of 'backroom boy' (Geiger, 2007), its undercover role of informal advisor on border issues. It remains isolated from the humanitarian ecosystem: most interviewees from humanitarian organisations had not heard of its activities in Lebanon. Three phases of the IBM project have taken place so far totalling approximately 45 million euros: phase 1 ('Developing National Capability for IBM') started in October 2012 and ended in December 2015, phase 2 ('Enhanced Capability') began in January 2016 and concluded in December 2018, and phase 3 ('Strengthening Capability') began in January 2020 and will end in November 2023.

---

[239] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.

C) Technicising Lebanon's border and security assemblage: establishing the problem and its diagnosis

In this section, I show how the ICMPD 'technicises' Lebanon's border and security assemblage and construct a particular understanding of its 'issues'. Such technicisation entails two steps. The first one is the elaboration of a diagnosis: security professionals interpret Lebanon's hybrid security assemblage as symptomatic of state weakness, lack of sovereignty and sectarian divides. The second one is the promotion of the ICMPD's role, first as a neutral facilitator which enables to bring all the participants to the table in spite of sectarian divides; second, as a broker of neutral knowledge and depoliticised expertise. In this process, the ICMPD encourages a process of state-building, as it does not ambition to take on the state's functions, but rather to facilitate its duties. The ICMPD supports an 'etatistic model, which emphasises the need to strengthen state regulatory performance'. In this view, it is merely a 'service and consultative institution for the states', aiming to 'facilitate states' with no independent policy-making functions.[240]

This chapter adds to the literature on depoliticisation as technic used by IOs in the competitive process of agenda-setting, by showing how framing policy problems allows to identify appropriate solutions. I draw on the concept of governmentality as a two-step process (Foucault 2007, *cited in* Walters 2015): in the first phase, the ICMPD creates the conditions of intelligibility, the reasoning, the representations and the accepted forms of knowledge that are propitious to its interventions. Then, the organisation attempts to legitimise its future interventions by showing that they are based on a neutral and objective assessment of the situation.

1. *A weak state lacking sovereignty*

As mentioned earlier, Lebanon's border assemblage is characterised by its porosity and its hybridity (Tholens 2017), i.e. the coexistence of non-state and state forms of authority, of

---

[240] Cf statements by Widgren Hoffmann, cited in Hess 2010. He describes the political approach of ICMPD as 'technocratic' and 'etatistic'.

formal and non-formal governance structures and local security mechanisms. I posit that the ICMPD technicises this assemblage by framing it as a symptom of state weakness and lack of sovereignty, and not as the result of historical cross-border circulations. This technical interpretation is a form of depoliticisation since it fixes issues in a context of technical deficiencies and regulations while avoiding putting them into politics. The fact that the ICMPD supports a state-driven model makes this diagnosis of state weakness all the more crucial for the legitimatisation of its interventions: the ICMPD needs a state to act upon.

The conviction that the fundamentals or 'basics' of border governance are not in place in Lebanon permeates this research:

> 'The thing about Lebanon, is that this is a place where the basics are not in place yet: basic infrastructure, basic equipment, training, they are not in place. They are getting there, slowly, but there are not in place. So we don't even have a full situational picture of what Lebanon is like. There is no infrastructure, and there is no governance. Everything remains to be done.'[241]

> 'In 2011, the airport was a mess. There was no equipment. No security. We had to invest a lot in equipment, infrastructure … You have some countries where we do the capacity-building and the training only. Like in Libya, we would not have thought of providing basic equipment. But in Lebanon, you have to.'[242]

> 'In all of the border crossings, the infrastructures are bad, the layout, security and upkeep are deficient, and to improve all this, we would have to start rebuilding entirely border crossings. And that's very expensive. For some parts, the border is a river, other, there is no proper delineation. The borderline is non-existent. In addition, some bridges are owned by the Lebanese, the other half by Syria, and there is no prospect of seeing this settled. So there are big challenges.'[243]

On top of a lack of infrastructure, equipment and border delineation with Syria, the absence of data gathering on migratory movements was emphasised as a crucial obstacle to good

---

[241] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[242] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, December 2018.
[243] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.

governance. At the end of 2018, interviewees from the ICMPD and European administrations depicted an overall picture of the GSO and the Customs as unable to collect and record the most basic data on cross-border movements:

'There are significant gaps in the system of General Security. GSO officers can very accurately check someone's passport, but at the moment they don't have access to data and cannot record into the system if two people travel together, they can't link them. If you and I were in a car, they could check your passport and my passport accurately, but not link them together … Interventions are necessary to remedy these gaps. We have been working for quite a long time, but it is slow. IT projects are notorious for being difficult. But I am confident that in a not too distant future, this system will be up and running.'[244]

'In terms of land - irregular crossings - I am not sure what they can do. The LAF needs to identify them and refer to the military police; and then, ultimately, the persons get referred to General Security because they are Syrians, and if they are Lebanese, they are referred to the ISF. But I don't think there is any great picture on that, on how many irregular crossings take place every day. Certainly, we asked the LAF to give us statistics, but none of them was really happy to do so… Some of them did but they were not really useful. So I am not sure there is any real picture on the border and what happens. This is not good. There is no central border operation. In Jordan, the General System information about border crossing points is way more effective.'[245]

'They were still working with papers until very recently! That makes it complex, even impossible, to share information.'[246]

Interviewees from the ICMPD and the EU insisted on the lack of resources and organisation characteristic of the Customs: 'Customs are a challenge because they are roughly organised, under-resourced, their organisation is quite primitive, really, and there are corruption issues' …[247] The 'corruption' was perceived as a strong issue – as mentioned earlier, a key

---

[244] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[245] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[246] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[247] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.

depoliticising 'buzzword' in development discourse (Koechlin 2013), it is also a political concept produced by the development discourse which shapes social realities. This was a source of concern for ICMPD representatives, as Customs are generally their privileged interlocutor, as they are 'seen as vital to the neo-liberal notion of filtering desired goods while prioritising the fight against organised crime' (Tholens 2017: 878): in the ICMPD's neoliberal doxa, their mission is crucial. One of the ICMPD's first mission was thus to 'rehabilitate the Customs'.[248] The LAF was criticised for its 'weakness' and its absence from some border areas where Hezbollah reigns. In comparison, the GSO maintains a reputation among ICMPD interviewees of being a good and reliable partner for the international community.

The fact that border management is undertaken by a myriad of actors and not one specific state agency, along with the limited institutionalisation and cooperation between such actors, were grasped as a governance 'failure'. Indeed, among international development and security professionals, the assumption that countries exhibiting mature levels of institutional capacity should have similar characteristics such as one lead agency dedicated to immigration and border is prevalent. As a representative of the EU put it:

> 'There is a need to clarify the mandate of each agency to work together. Hopefully, the Lebanese are really educated and speak English, so there is no language barrier. But their mandate is unclear. We don't know who is supposed to do what, and they don't know either.'[249]

> 'The best would be setting-up an operation room, where concerned services by borders would each be represented for decision-making... Let's say, the Lebanese army will stop, let's say a smuggler or a Syrian with a fake ID. General security will react quickly for the fake. This would facilitate the coordination between them, and this is much needed.'[250]

Providing such technical assessment of border-related matters has strong depoliticising effects, as it transforms the logic of practice from a political into a managerial one. The framing of Lebanese policy problems as technical weaknesses allows the ICMPD to identify appropriate

---

[248] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, September 2021.
[249] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[250] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.

solutions and to define its goals without the possibility of further political debates. Indeed, according to Flinders & Woods (2014: 142), 'the great promise of technicity, however, was that unlike theological, metaphysical, moral and even economic questions – that are forever debatable – purely technical problems have something refreshingly factual and neutral about them': they 'silence structural and political causes while supporting seemingly apolitical solutions'.

2. *Sectarian and partisan divisions: politics in the way of projects*

Another narrative that justifies the ICMPD's interventions is the assumption, first that sectarian divides are rife between security agencies but also within them, and second that they are the main factor hindering their work. Salloukh et al. (2016) have described the post-war sectarian security landscape, riddled with 'weak state institutions serv[ing] as arenas for contestation between competing members of the sectarian/political elite' (108). They contend that 'Lebanon's sectarian system informs these institutions' roles, composition, and politics'. However, after being subjected to sectarian competition during the war and Syrian hegemony, the LAF adopted after 2005 a 'pragmatic post-Syria policy of neutrality' (108) and became a 'nationally representative security institution' with the implementation of sectarian quota system at different hierarchical levels (118). 'Concurrently, it gradually established its position as an institution trusted by a substantial cross-section of society in post-Syria Lebanon' (Salloukh et al. *ibid*.). Meanwhile, other security institutions have fallen into sectarian competition: 'Lebanon's sectarian system and demands of the country's sectarian groups have influenced the development of Lebanon's functionally non-military national security institutions' (*ibid*.: 112). The ISF became associated with the Future Movement and the GSO with Hezbollah, while the Custom remains riven by tensions at different hierarchical levels.

Even though the hegemony of sectarian modes of subjectification is important to grasp the *modus operandi* of Lebanese security institutions, the hybridity of security assemblage and local transborder dynamics have also played a crucial role in shaping border policies. However, interviewees from the ICMPD and the EU give rather simplistic interpretations of Lebanon's security assemblage. Security agencies 'do not want to work together" and would rather "stick

to their sectarian interests.'[251] This quote from a representative of the EU delegation captures this point of view:

> 'We are very much affected by sectarian politics. The main challenge and difficulty for the implementation of this project is the political situation. It is hard to get the formal approval for projects. When there was no presidency, we could not get approval. The system is very hierarchical, which makes the decision-making very slow. There is a need to clarify the mandate of each agency to work together. The coordination from the Lebanese authorities is non-existent. They are too divided. The ISF are dominated by the Future Movement, GSO by Hezbollah...'[252]

> 'It is hard to get anything done with them. For sure it is sectarian divisions, but also maybe lack of expertise, of political will, administrative obstacles ...'[253]

A former employee of the GSO said that the relations with Hezbollah is 'fusion, for political reasons' which hinders its work: 'the only good cooperation takes place between Hezbollah and GSO'. The ISF was dismissed for being too 'attached to the Future Movement'.[254] Only the LAF was spared by such criticism, due to its multi-sectarian nature. The inefficiency of the Customs was dismissed as resulting from 'a conflict between the military and civilian sections due to sectarian divides':

> 'There are division issues with the Customs. If you see the organigram, there is a Higher Council for the Customs, and one DG. The DG is supported by the Future Movement, and the Higher Council by Amal. And then, the President, by another movement. So, until that changes, the Customs won't make it work.'[255]

> 'The problem with the Customs is the conflict between the two branches, and also the corruption, and their system who really needs reform … Before rebuilding, we need to completely change their system. The Customs need to be rehabilitated.'[256]

---

[251] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.
[252] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[253] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[254] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018
[255] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[256] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.

Conflicts were also brought back to 'differences in organisational culture' and 'mentalities'. A representative of the GSO said that 'security agencies have this culture of secrecy with a prism limited to security, this culture of not sharing information and not interacting with others, so we try to enhance dialogue between them and non-security actors'.[257] Conflicts between the civilian branch of the Customs (the Customs Office, responsible for clearing goods and people) and the brigades (responsible for controlling customs) were framed as an issue of culture and mentality. The latter works closely with their officer colleagues in the LAF, the GSO and the ISF, with whom they share a 'common operational culture' as they were all trained at the military academy, while the former has a 'civilian spirit'. In the same vein, a retired officer from GSO explained that the pilot IBM project did not work due to 'the mentality differing between the services […] a military works in one way, an employee from the Customs in a different way, it depends on who will give the order, how will they apply'. She came to the conclusion that 'in my opinion, even now, the right spirit does not prevail. Due to this lack of cooperation'.[258] The top-down nature of decision-making and bureaucratic hurdles were also subject of complaints: 'the mentality is too military, it's like we need an authorisation for everything'.[259]

Therefore, political phenomena such as hybrid sovereignties, foreign allegiances, post and present relations with the Syrian regime, porousness between Lebanon and Syria, and micro-governance regimes are solely analysed as coming down to inevitable 'sectarian divisions'. This vocabulary of fate moves the analysis away from the idea of political choice while preparing the ground for international interventions.

According to interviewees, such sectarian patterns of rule translate in a refusal to agree on a national strategy, as a representative of the maritime Customs administration put it: 'it would take serious energy to get the Lebanese security agencies to come up with a strategy'.[260] Another said that: 'I will tell you. In Lebanon, we never had a national border strategy. The army, they may have their own strategy. The ISF, they may have. But we never had more than one for

---

[257] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[258] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[259] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[260] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.

all'.[261] The literature has indeed shown that the desire of Lebanon's political elites to stifle the post-2005 LAF's limited autonomy on national security matters has translated in a strong reaction of competing members of the sectarian/political elite against the elaboration of Lebanon's so-called 'national defense strategy' (Salloukh et al. 2016: 130). This was confirmed during my fieldwork:

'The political aspect is blocking because they don't have full confidence. They don't want to give us dates, information, and so on. There is no coordination structure with everyone inside, at least not yet. Now, there is a strategy that was drafted with an action plan accepted by the DGs of the involved agencies, by their ministries, and so on. And this was submitted to the Council of Ministers. But until now, this strategy is still in the drawer. Because the word strategy scares them. This is a technical strategy, but the word strategy prevents them from going any further. Some consider it resistance, other consider it something else. Sectarian politics complicates radical decisions.'[262]

A representative of the ICRC explained that its organisation ends up playing the role of the focal point between the LAF, the ISF, the GSO and humanitarian actors such as the Lebanese Red Cross, as they do not communicate:

'The different Lebanese entities do not talk to each other. In particular security entities, as each security entity is affiliated to different political and community groups. Thus, we are faced with delicate situations … For instance, the last time, at the ISF they were upset about the fact that Yemenis were brought to Lebanon by the ICRC to be taken cared of at one of our hospitals. So, we, at the ICRC, had to tell them that the GSO gave their green light at the airport so they could come here. But the ISF did not know, because they never talk to each other.'[263]

However, another representative of the ICRC tempered these views with the idea that this situation is not specific to Lebanon but commonplace in their field of operations. She argued that cooperation with security entities is 'always a long, a tiring process':

---

[261] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, January 2019.
[262] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[263] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Beirut, November 2018.

'I have never been to any country where security forces interact with each other, including Italy, including Europe. Interpol does not always interact with all its partners. It is always an issue for us because you really have to spend much more time and you have to start from scratch. But this has never been easy anywhere. Of course, this brings confusion: sometimes you have a visa coming from the GSO but maybe the GSO did not communicate with MSF. Or with the ISF. But for me, this work is a normal, routine activity with security forces.'[264]

Therefore, framing these characteristics as unique and defining features of Lebanon's governance paves the way for international cooperation. This diagnosis of Lebanon's weakness is the basis from which objectives will be defined, without further political debates. Indeed, the widely perceived weak capacity and ineptitude of Lebanon's security institutions in controlling their external borders have triggered interventionism in the form of an expanding array of international state building and security assistance, programmes and initiatives.

D) International border interventions: a top-down, need-based and technocratic logic embedded in neutral expertise

I identify three narratives of legitimisation surrounding the ICMPD's interventions: its role as a neutral actor in front of divided sectarian interests; its need-based approach tailored to the Lebanese situation; and its seemingly neutral knowledge and expertise. The literature has indeed shown how IO's knowledge production is not simply about research but is inherently a commercial issue enabling the growth of their business (Nay 2014); thus, the way the ICMPD and EU professionals describe migration and border-related problems in Lebanon is tied to their own strategy and their attempts to sell their services to Lebanese security entities.

---

[264] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Beirut, October 2018.

1. *The ICMPD: a neutral actor bringing all stakeholders together*

Cooperation between security actors is a crucial aspect of the IBM strategy as it is based on the reasoning that the results of individual border agencies generally improve when their level of cooperation is enhanced. The IBM concept was first used by EU agencies to frame a European model of 'good border governance' (Carrera 2008), i.e. open but well-controlled and secured borders, an objective reached by enhancing the coordination and cooperation among all the relevant border authorities at national and international levels.

To promote the IBM model, the ICMPD acts as a mediator allowing a spectrum of security actors to put politics aside and find common ground. Its strategy is twofold: first, it depoliticises potentially sensitive issues, and second, it performs neutrality by depicting itself and its expertise as isolated from politics. As an ICMPD key expert put it:

> 'I think we created a neutral kind of atmosphere in front of sectarian politics. This has to be taken in the context of the Lebanese army being under constant suspicion, post-Syria, of being too politicised and sectarian.'[265]

The ICMPD positions itself as above sovereign interests due to its reliance on multiple donors: 'we are a mixture of EU nationalities, European nationalities, agencies, we work together and I think the beneficiaries see that as well. We don't follow the interest of one specific donor'.[266] The ICMPD insists on the purely technocratic character of its interventions (implying that a technical field distinct from politics does exist), as captured by this quote:

> 'The ICMPD has allowed for improvements in the security sector because now, we have this project with a technical approach and we put politics aside. This is more an expertise approach. For instance, the Swiss put a lot of money on human rights and gender issues, because this is their expertise. This technical approach has allowed us to reach many outcomes. They managed to put together all the services thanks to a lot of common workshops, training, study visits, everyone was there: Customs, Army, GS, ISF. So for

---

[265] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[266] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.

instance, now, everyone communicates for document security, this is an improvement.'[267]

'Before the IBM project, there was one project we did not like because it put the LAF above other security agencies. While with the IBM, the approach is different. We started from the very beginning steps by steps. All agencies are at the same level, we work in parallel. We have common workshops, bilateral workshops or meetings for each agencies.'[268]

An ICMPD consultant said that 'as long as we are in the technical, it does not bother anyone. We improve the technical means of security agencies. So, there is no resistance.'[269] Another talked about 'a very technical strategy that could lead to more donations, because when it comes to technical only like this, the project is efficient'.[270]

A security officer from the EU delegation expressed the same idea:

'We talk with everyone. We play the role of informal mediator. The EU, the ICMPD, are the only actors who work with all agencies. Bilateral donors have their privileged agencies, they don't follow our cohesive approach. Us, we try not to go to one partner in particular because he would be easier, more accessible, but we keep a much broader focus to reach all levels and to address all of them.'[271]

The reluctance of the Council of Minister to adopt a border strategy was interpreted as a misunderstanding about the actual meaning of the word 'strategy': according to interviewees, they mistakenly interpret it as something political while that this is actually a technical word. Depoliticising the idea of strategy is thus seen as the solution to gather Lebanese actors around the table:

[267] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2020.
[268] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.
[269] Interview with a consultant for ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, December 2019.
[270] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2020.

'We had to frame this strategy as technical. If we put politics aside, everything goes well. We had to show them that this is not about politics, the ICMPD does not get involved in politics. For them, having a national security strategy is a technical undertaking. This is neutral. We help them develop action plans, support a maritime and land border strategy. So eventually, they come up with their own strategy.'[272]

'Back in the early days, we had some projects by EU Member States, but they did not prove very sustainable. The EU decided that they would have one big project with a large funding, which would try to be comprehensive and have a sort of mechanism to improve coordination between EU Member States.'[273]

Due to its mandate, the ICRC (though a humanitarian organisation) works closely with security entities. Representatives also emphasised its role as a seemingly neutral actor allowing crucial cooperation between competing actors:

'The ICRC has an all-encompassing approach. We dialogue with everyone. This is very much linked to the mandate of the institution, which is historically related to negotiations, military mediation, etc., in conflicts. In Lebanon, we discuss with all the factions, in the Palestinian camps, Hezbollah, the Military, we communicate with all of them. In Lebanon, you have 18 religions and different parties. Hezbollah is part of the national authorities: we communicate with them. This gives us leverage. I don't think a small NGO would be able to address all of them the way we do.'[274]

'The dialogue and cooperation with security entities, GSO, Hezbollah, the LAF, has always been there and has always been good. Even for contentious issues such as the missing persons from the war, hospital, protection, camp security, refugee status, we dialogue with everyone. But it has always been a long, tiring process.'[275]

To palliate governmental instability, in 2018 the ICMPD pushed for the appointment of one person at the governmental level to be responsible for everything border-related and ensure

---

[272] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, September 2021.
[273] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[274] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Tripoli, January 2019.
[275] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Tripoli, January 2019.

continuity, but the Council of Minister declined this proposition.[276] An EU security officer admitted that 'there has been some improvement. What has made things easier is that now we get the security actors and the beneficiaries involved'. She emphasised that 'the cooperation with the Lebanese authorities have gotten better and better over the years'.[277] The insistence on trust-building and the mobilisation of the vocabulary of friendship reveals the informality of the workings of the ICMPD (in line with Hess 2010):

'The international community needed to build a trustful relation with all the authorities from Lebanon above sectarian lines, not focusing on one specific actor or one another, but all of them. But it is getting better, we made a lot of progress. The IBM is successful. For instance, now, the ISF has a training with GSO, they cooperate, and this would not have been possible before.'[278]

'Now at least we managed to have one strategy. At the governmental level, they may not, but it's the first time that we have the national strategy. It may be adopted it may not be, but at least we have it. Plus, they improved the coordination between different agencies in terms of communication and negotiation. They make all these forces work together. We have the border committee, all the agencies are finally meeting, which is necessary if you want to enhance communication between them. Now, we are friends with one another.'[279]

Indeed, the ICMPD has capitalised on the existence of the Bordel Control Committee (BCC). This structure brings together General Security, the Customs, the LAF, the ISF, the Civil Defence, the Lebanese Red Cross and foreign donors. Indeed, nearly every European and North American embassy undertakes security assistance in the framework of the IBM project or through their own bilateral channels and each donor has carved out its own niche. Germany and the United Kingdom have specialised in the provision of infrastructure, France in training and airport security, the Netherlands and Denmark in training and equipment, Switzerland in human rights and humanitarian issues, while the United States is the most prominent support for the

---

[276] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, January 2019.
[277] Interview with a representative of the EU Delegation, Beirut, January 2019.
[278] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, January 2019.
[279] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.

Army.[280] European and Lebanese officials praise the IBM project for allowing to avoid duplication of projects, ensuring continuity in funding and allowing substantial reduction of costs (in terms of office costs, staff salaries, etc.). Ultimately, international security assistance went from a few scattered, piecemeal projects to a robust and cohesive strategy that was agreed upon by both foreign and national stakeholders. In addition, in order to enhance cohesion between security actors as well as their dialogue with civilian actors around border issues, the ICMPD and the EU have offered to fund a curriculum in security studies with the American University so as to 'push them to share information', a project that was still impending in 2022.[281]

The ICMPD's insistence on the necessity to 'build trust' and 'relationship building' is depoliticising as it brings deeply political issues of power to the personal level. One contentious issue for the Lebanese authorities is the sharing of data on migrants with their European counterparts: instead of being framed as politically-sensitive, this issue was framed as a matter of 'trust' or 'passivity'. For instance, an EU security officer said that 'the Lebanese authorities are accustomed to receiving information and training, but not sharing information. They still don't trust us'.[282]

The idea that IOs play the role of mediator fostering the same language and definition of the problem to allow policy progress goes back to Mitrani functionalism and its assumption that a technical approach to international politics can promote peace by neutralising the politicisation of issues and organising interdependence between a wide range of actors (Mitrani 1966, cited in Maertens & Louis 2020). In the end, the adoption of the notion of IBM as a natural and self-evident way of framing border governance (even though it is opposed to the workings of the existing security and border assemblage) is indicative of the successful lobbying practices of European actors, pushing to normalise a paradigm of migration management and its associated 'good practices'.

---

[280] Finland, Italy, Poland, Italy, Romania, Cyprus and Spain are other prominent donors.
[281] Interview with an EUDEL officer, October 2018.
[282] Interview with a representative of the EU Delegation, Beirut, September 2021.

A) A need-based process

One crucial aspect of the ICMPD's line of justification is the assumption that its 'solutions' are tailored to the situation of Lebanon. Indeed, 'whereas the EU is gaining points as an important transmitter of norms, the ICMPD stands out as an efficient provider of concrete expertise and tailor-made solutions' (Korneev 2013: 316).

> 'There are so many needs here, so much to do. We had to identify the specific needs of Lebanon. We started with a deep assessment in cooperation with the Lebanese administrations. They helped us draft a mapping of Lebanon's needs: infrastructure, training, capacity-building … This was the starting point.'[283]

> 'For the Customs, we started from the very beginning with conferences, and then we made a gaps and needs analysis agencies by agencies with border experts. And we started realising what were our issues. And then, the idea was to come up with a border strategy, something specific. We had a lot of needs, and [the ICMPD] cannot give us everything that is missing but they supported us with a lot of training and setting goals. The important thing is that we decided what were our needs. It's need-based.'[284]

Likewise, a representative of the Customs described the inception of the IBM project as regards the airport:

> 'The head of Customs at the airport was having discussions with the ICMPD to identify needs and deficiencies. It started as a French technical initiatives, to see where the EU could come up and help, depending on Lebanon's needs.'[285]

---

[283] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[284] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.
[285] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.

1. *Material and infrastructural support: creating the conditions for applying IOs 'solutions'*

During the first years of the IBM project, material and infrastructural support was the bulk of European security interventions. A great deal was allocated to reinforcing the land border with Syria, to improving security at Beirut airport and the Port of Tripoli, the provision of border infrastructure and control equipment to detect fake documentation and fraud, fingerprinting, sophisticated intelligence technologies, communication and information technology, tour of station and vehicles. The UK provided Lebanon with several tours of station and watchtowers disposed along the land border with Syria, as well as coastal observation equipment. The Netherlands provided the GSO with laboratories and equipment at each border post to identify fake documentation. Such support is not neutral as these infrastructures have helped turn a porous borderland into a surveillance apparatus: 'while technical assistance and assessment missions on the ground are able to directly shape political decisions, material support helps create the conditions for applying IOs suggested solutions' (Maertens & Louis 2021: 46). This task was challenging due to the lack of border delineation and the geographic characteristics:

> 'You get the land border itself, which in the North is not so difficult to police because there is a river there, even if it is not a very big one, it is a clear demarcation; then in the East it is very difficult because you need to have flat plains, and if you go North of that line, you have very high mountains. The UK, the USA, Canada and Germany together have built a whole series of watchtowers, which is a good thing, but even if you see someone you still need to try to get there and that is not easy with the mountains. Weather conditions are not good, summers are not good, in winter these guys are isolated and they have no water. So we provided mobile water tankers, electricity through a generator, and container buildings. So those conditions are difficult.'[286]

Providing Lebanese security entities with the tools and equipment to collect data on Syrian migrants is a key step towards the implementation of a system of surveillance and selection. Interviewees from the ICMPD and the EU insisted on the need for quantification: the lack of adequate data on migration was seen as a 'chronic obstacle' to good governance:

---

[286] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.

'GS officers can very accurately check someone's passport, but at the moment they don't have access to data and cannot record into the system, so if two people travel together, they cannot link them. If you and I were in a car, they could check your passport and mine very accurately but not link them. There are still gaps in the system. But it is improving. We have been working for quite a long time. IT projects are notorious at being difficult. But I am confident in not too distance future a system will be up and running and the GS part will be much better at identifying irregular migrants.'[287]

'Before our interventions, they were still using registries with papers. Now, slowly, there is an informatic system, we can trace whether this Syrian individual came before, we can monitor their circulation between Lebanon and Syria. It is not perfect, but it is much better!'[288]

The technocratic polish of quantification conveys a strong depoliticising dimension as it amounts to a reduction of the world to numbers: quantification vastly enhances the power of these claims of objectivity and impartiality (Robinson 2020: 124). As reinvigorating efforts on monitoring and data collection is a way to enhance mobility control, by rendering otherwise unknowable population knowable, a great deal of funding was dedicated to communication and information technology system. In 2019 a new project bankrolled by Denmark focused on 'improving data management capacities of national institutions in Lebanon to improve the level of policy sophistication of security technology'.[289] The ICMPD assisted the GSO, the ISF and the Army with training and equipment in documentation and document frauds. A cooperation with Interpol and Europol started with workshops, with the ultimate goal of extending concretely sharing of personal data. The Council of the EU agreed to start negotiations with Lebanon. According to an EU security officer based in Brussels:

---

[287] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[288] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[289] Source: https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/improving-migration-data-management-capacities-of-national-institutions-in-lebanon. Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.

'The sharing sensitive data from Lebanon would be beneficial for countering terrorism. Lebanon is very passive in this field, but the authorities are not reluctant. We are progressively pushing for this.'[290]

Thus, while material support can be perceived as neutral, it does have a political dimension as it represents a tool in the ICMPD's political strategy for intervention.

2. *Conveying the paradigm of migration management: pedagogic tools, neutral expertise and European knowledge systems*

After gathering all the actors involved and providing Lebanon with the requisite equipment, the next crucial step in the ICMPD's interventions is to convey paradigms of border and migration management. Boswell (2008 & 2009) has foregrounded the structural power and symbolic functions of expertise in immigration and border policy. She points at the 'political role of knowledge': in the field of European immigration policies, expertise has become a resource for lending credibility to controversial claims, underpinning high-risk decisions or bolstering the credibility of government agencies. In Lebanon, the ICMPD deploys a top-down, pedagogic strategy for the diffusion of European norms of migration and border management, which uncovers a process of 'socialisation' between European and Lebanese security actors through training sessions and study visits. Fine (2016) has shown that the promotion of a common language and understandings of bordercratic processes goes through the mobilisation of a transnational network of security professionals (a 'bordercratic tribe') for which the production of knowledge is a key component. I posit that in the case of Lebanon, these socialisation processes are crucial for the Europeanisation of Lebanese security agencies' frames and understandings, but also for the promotion of a common understanding between Lebanese security actors. The literature has shown that through the production and promotion of expert knowledge, IOs foster a 'consent generating apparatus' (Ashutosh & Mountz 2011), crucial in externalisation and bordering processes taking place in politically sensitive contexts.

---

[290] Interview with a representative of DG HOME, Brussels, February 2020.

Through training and study visits but also the production of policy orientated reports, the ICMPD has promoted a holistic approach defending the complementary between policies such as facilitating trade, contributing to increased detection of illicit trans-border activities, ensuring security, and easing movement of 'legitimate' travellers.[291] An ICMPD key expert argued that 'from the onset, the rationale of the project was border management, facilitating trade, legitimate travellers and protection cases' and that this holistic approach represents the added value of its organisation:

> 'You need a comprehensive solution: if you want it to be effective, it has to be a comprehensive set-up. So, we started with the land, and then the port of Tripoli, because this is a big port, and then the airport. Thus, all kinds of borders are involved […] while the IOM, they cheat a little bit. And it's not comprehensive. It tends to deal only with immigration. While with us, the IBM approach includes the security, migration, the economic aspect.'[292]

Training sessions and workshops delivered by the ICMPD and European police and security delegations play a key role in the diffusion of a mentality of migration management. This training was focused on documentation, border investigations, managing mixed migration flows (a key concept of migration management), information exchange, trafficking in human beings following European standard operative procedure, etc.[293] It also included trade-related, human rights and humanitarian components. They put forth an apparently naive and innocent rhetoric, with phrases such as 'managing migration for the benefit of all', 'well-managed migration', 'well-managed border' … As noted by Geiger (2020: 298), the language of migration management is often unclear and open to interpretation. By strategically emphasising the shared benefits of border interventions, this rhetoric downplays the power imbalances between European donors and Lebanon.

In May 2018, the ICMPD inaugurated the 'IBM Central Training Centre', a 2400 square metres and three-floor renovated building located within the Riyak military Airbase in Eastern Beqaa. The Netherlands was the most prominent bilateral donor and has kept donating equipment in the following years. The IBM Central Training Centre aims to 'contribute to strengthening IBM

---

[292] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[293] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.

cooperation between authorities and agencies involved in border security, trade facilitation and the movement of people' and to 'support the LAC in shifting its focus towards expanding border management system':

> 'It hosts training for all border agencies on border management, in particular documentation and border investigation, with a focus on training for the LAF Land Borders Regiment to enable it to undertake border police missions, but also Customs and GSO. We have a capacity of 200 trainees simultaneously.'[294]

During the inauguration of the Centre under the patronage of the Commandant of the Army Joseph Aoun, the UE Ambassador Christina Lassen stated that:

> 'The inauguration of this centre is a new tangible evidence of our support. Lebanon's stability is of major concern for the EU and the international community. We think that only a stable security environment can pave the way for more investments and economic developments on the long run in a country that greatly needs it.'[295]

The IBM Central Training Centre and the training are crucial stages enabling a socialisation process between European and Lebanese security actors, concerned with assimilating countries to EU norms and values through the logic of appropriateness. Lebanese participants are brought into European cultural norms through persuasion rather than coercion or imposition. Socialisation plays a role in the constitution of authority: producers of knowledge assert their capacity to persuade and guide Lebanese actors towards specific and measurable goals. Successfully bringing states into the European fold is not only about capability but also about securing willing ownership of a particular way of governing. Wenger (1998: 2-3) and Fine (2016: 173) have shown that the formation of willing subjects is a critical part of governing countries along with the formation of a transnational class of security professionals around a 'community of practices'.

---

[294] Interview with a representative of ICMPD, January 2019.
[295] Source : Lebanese Army's website, available at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/inauguration-ceremony-riyak-training-center-headquarters-6th-intervention-regiment

In addition, the ICMPD organises every year a dozen study visits of Lebanese officials in Europe, which usually gather from 50 to 100 participants. The idea is to expose Lebanese officials to international best practices in border management in Northern countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, France or Finland (also among the main contributors to the ICMPD's budget in Lebanon), or countries bordering the EU and faced with irregular migrant arrivals in Southern and Eastern Europe such as Italy, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia. These visits aim to observe first-hand 'modern border education practices', i.e. border investigations, risk analysis, border police patrol ships, border police, etc. They took place at land border posts, in airports and at sea. For instance, a Lebanese delegation visited the Nice airport in January 2019, while another one visited border police patrol ship at the port of Constanța in the Black Sea, Romania, after completing a maritime training in Spain a month later.

> 'By meeting these experts, by going to different countries, we are exposed to many European borders, we see these states that are prepared to achieve the EU standards to become part of the Schengen system. We see what they are doing there, how they get prepared. We had a good experience with them. We went to EU countries like Slovenia, Poland, but also Ukraine because these are external borders with Russia. Some visits also took place in Africa, in Algeria. But mainly to EU and Eastern European countries on the brink of entering the EU.'[296]

> 'We expose border agencies to practices in Europe [...] Exchanges between peers, EU delegations coming here, Lebanese delegations going to Europe. We facilitate interactions with peer agencies, so the Lebanese can see different models and develop a vision. For instance, the Lebanese delegations recently went to Amsterdam to visit the airport.'[297]

These quotes capture a Eurocentric logic: Lebanon is implicitly compared to EU accession countries which managed to 'protect' their borders. The ICMPD capitalises on its experience in terms of migration management for accessing countries to meet the EU acquis (Georgi 2010; Hess 2010). Lebanese indicators and policies are assessed in light of EU norms and models,

---

[296] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.
[297] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.

along with tools and indicators anchored with Southern and Eastern European experiences. Therefore, the depoliticisation of the ICMPD's interventions entails a process of 'simplification' (the decontextualisation of culturally specific details and the emphasis on general properties) and 'reification' (the translation and quantification of complex political phenomena into fixed and universal categories). This approach involves identifying the common characteristics and challenges in the targeted countries and developing unified guidelines for embedding the minimum regional standards.

Processes of simplification and reification also entail the comparison between Lebanon and other Middle Eastern and North African countries, thereby erasing their specificities. Study visits included Jordan and Iraq, as well as Maghreb countries such as Algeria and Tunisia.[298] In conversations, comparisons with Jordan was commonplace, along with the underlying assumption that these countries are part of a 'Middle-East package' making them prone to comparison, despite the fact that their respective problematics of border governance have little in common. Between 2012 and 2022, the ICMPD team in Lebanon went to Jordan several times and vice versa, delegations from the Jordanian public security directorate and the Customs came to Lebanon, and the GSO visited Jordan on several occasions.[299]

3. *A language of self-ownership, participation and empowerment*

Following a governmentality approach conceiving of power as diffuse, European security actors have exercised power over Lebanese security actors by steering them towards an 'appropriate behaviour'. By fostering a language of self-ownership, agency participation and empowerment, they foster an atmosphere of equality which conceals power asymmetries. Despite its top-down, pedagogical methods, the ICMPD thus entrenches a non-coercive rationale that supports the appearance of a horizontal relationship. This involves several tactics.

First, the equalisation between European and Lebanese security actors goes by the assumption that the decision-making power remains ultimately in the hands of the Lebanese. Interviewees insisted on the fact that projects are not imposed on Lebanon:

---

[298] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.
[299] Interview with a representative of ICMPD, January 2019.

'The Europeans see what Lebanon's needs are. This is the very first step. They offer projects that might be accepted. But they don't impose anything. Then, Lebanon decides if they want to accept the projects.'[300]

According to a representative of the EU delegation, 'there is a sense that they own the project. They have great leadership'.[301] This falls in line with Zürcher's statements on selective guidance and conviction on the part of states, as governmental recipe for success, whereby 'measures need to be accepted to be implemented' (cited in Hess 2010: 109). However, interviewees from the ICMPD reminded the power discrepancy:

'In my experience, the people from the Lebanese administration never ask for new projects and they never refuse the ones we offer, they never say, 'no, we don't want that', they are too polite to refuse.'[302]

Another tactic is to hire Lebanese experts. It is indeed commonplace for the ICMPD to hire external consultants from the national administrations of their countries of operation. Former employees of GSO and of the Customs have thus worked for the ICMPD as advisors. In addition, the ICMPD encourages 'peer-exchanges': after being trained by European security officials, Lebanese experts have been sent to Iraq and to Jordan to provide training to their homologues. For instance, in June 2021, the ICMPD has hosted a security delegation from Jordan (from the border and residency directorate and the Customs) to be trained by the GSO and the Lebanese Customs. Likewise, Lebanese authorities went to Iraq 'so they could themselves train authorities at border posts there'.[303] This way, Lebanese security officials are becoming active subjects in European bordering practices not only regarding Lebanon's domestic agenda but also in the diffusion of migration management to its neighbours and further afield. In other words, Lebanon is becoming an agent of EU externalisation itself.

One crucial aspect of the ICMPD's *modus operandi* is its emphasis on state sovereignty: it conceives of itself as a facilitator which aims to reinforce state institutions. Its objective is to integrate the recipient state in wider international frameworks of migration management (and

---

[300] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[301] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[302] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.
[303] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, October 2021.

not hinder its development): 'The ICMPD's political ethics is that they never do politics themselves, rather they pass on information, as reliable actors for the states' (Hess 2010: 105). In this section, I have shed light on depoliticisation practices relying on a technicisation of Lebanon's security assemblage, and the deployment of expert knowledge, alleged objectivity and technocratic neutrality. After casting symbolic judgments on Lebanon's state capacity to manage borders and migration, the ICMPD has put forth its 'solutions'. It thus plays a critical role in transmitting a specific set of worldviews concerning migrations and how they should be governed, while concealing the political dimensions, epistemological positions, and professional biases of its interpretations. This lays the basis for interventions which shape the way border and migration management is cognitively apprehended. By 'constructing the social world', IOs acquire power and legitimacy (Barnett & Finnemore 2004), as reflected by these positive assessments from representatives of the Lebanese authorities:

> 'The cooperation for border management was a really good initiative, Lebanon needed it. In the end, thanks to these projects, Lebanon is the only country within the region that became a nation-state, with functioning borders and a multi-confessional and respected army.'[304]

> 'I think that the ICMPD should be implicated if there is an official decision on return. They have helped us a lot and they have a great expertise on return, and this is a difficult, delicate process.'[305]

III. The diffusion of the paradigm of migration management and its instrumentalisation by the Lebanese authorities: selection and exclusion practices

In this section, I draw attention to the diffusion of the paradigm of migration management with its selective, orderly and neoliberal ordeal, at odds with the paradigm of refugee protection defended by the UNHCR. I argue that this conception has been accepted and even

---

[304] Interview with a Lebanese diplomat, Paris, March 2019.
[305] Representative of a former GSO officer, consultant with the ICMPD, October 2021.

instrumentalised by Lebanese state officials for their own benefits: the paradigm of migration management (in particular the distinction between refugee and migrants and the sedentary bias) has ultimately helped them discursively legitimise their policies of increased control with the October policies and a new visa system for Syrians. This research thus contributes to the literature on power dynamics between migration IOs and Southern recipients of funds, showing how the former come to support the personal agenda of the latter in contradiction with a mere top-down approach. I end this section by showing that ultimately, the Lebanese authorities' overt securitisation of Syrian mobility comes in contradiction with the paradigm of migration management. This crystallises a debate on the role of non-state actors such as the ICMPD in the global migration management system: does it announce a retreat of state or a reconfiguration of statehood? We can ponder whether the ICMPD has real power to influence states or if it is 'just' a tool that states can use to further their own interests. The issue of the degree of state ownership in the case of Lebanon raises particular questions in terms of power balance as the ICMPD operates on earmarked funding from European countries which are structurally more influential than Lebanon. This section also highlights the role of technical assistance in shaping political decisions. Indeed, if the GoL and GSO's decisions to enforce stricter border control cannot be directly related to the ICMPD's influence, the organisation's support in infrastructure and equipment has certainly made the enforcement of such decisions easier.

A) A cognitive shift in the apprehension of Syrian mobility: categorising, selecting and illegalising

The diffusion by the ICMPD of norms of migration management following an orderly and neoliberal ordeal enters in contradiction with the paradigm of refugee protection defended by the UNHCR: in other words, the ICMPD treats a refugee problem through the prism of the paradigm of migration management. I posit that this way, the ICMPD has accompanied a cognitive shift in the apprehension of Syrian mobility in Lebanon and has ultimately allowed Lebanese authorities to discursively legitimise and enforce the October policies with a new visa system for Syrians. Progressively, existing paradigms were replaced by newer ones: the open-border regime of porous borders gave way to categorisation practices and a regime of (im)mobility infused by a sedentary bias and the illegalisation of Syrian mobility. These

findings illustrate the co-construction of this new paradigm by European and Lebanese actors alike, and the discursive formation of a system of legitimate and illegitimate Syrian mobility.

The ICMPD did not push nor lobby for the restriction of border controls, but the organisation has played a role in the enactment of these policies through capacity-building and training. This quotes captures the diffusion of a mentality of migration management and selection at the border:

> 'The main thing about IBM is to support the Lebanese authorities to put in place a system allowing to guarantee the legal movement of people and good, and thus prevent illegal movements for further control and the regularisation of legal migrants. The Syrian crisis has shown the huge relevance of these issues. It has pushed us to focus also on profiling and on human rights, assistance to people in need, identifying illegal migrants through identification training…'[306]

In the same vein, an ICMPD officer explained that they have been training the Army 'to turn them into a border police' so they would learn how to 'categorise' Syrian migrants crossing the border at non-official BCPs. This quote captures well this logic of border management:

> 'The other problem and challenge there is, is that the army is still getting used to the fact that they are not going to kill people anymore. They are actually there to act more as border guards, border police. There are not there to facilitate migration and they certainly understand that not everyone needs to settle. Whoever the army find who is crossing illegally or irregularly … Well, 'illegal migration' is not a politically correct term. But that's what they are doing! Anyways, they need to understand that among these guys who cross irregularly, not all of them are terrorists, some of them are just lazy people, people who got lost, or people who are actually fleeing from some kind of bad situation… This is a slow process, to identify these categories. And not all the donors support that idea: some of them are quite military about the whole thing.'[307]

In this quote, under the guise of protecting humanitarian cases, the ICMPD conveys a logic of illegalisation of displacement and distinction between 'good' and 'bad' migrants. The

---

[306] Interview with a representative of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.
[307] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.

representative depicts himself as the 'nice guy' who distances himself from overtly political and security discourses, and asserts the importance of a protection prism. He supports the idea that the Lebanese military should act in a more 'humane' way because 'not of all of them [Syrian migrants] are terrorists'. He also stresses that the ICMPD has a softer stance towards Syrian refugees than both the Lebanese and EU states when he recalls that 'some of the donors are quite military about the whole thing'. Finally, he entrenches the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate Syrian travellers ('irregular migration is not a politically-correct term, but this is what they are doing!', 'not everyone needs to settle'). In the end, he definitely plays into the securitisation of refugees by implying that some of them are indeed terrorists. Then the quote supports the idea that, above material support and capacity-building, a 'change of mentality' is needed:

> 'That's really part of the challenge. It is not a physical challenge: they have generated the equipment, and they've had a lot of training in police skills. But it's this kind of thinking for soldiers that needs to change: when someone comes from the dark, they see a potential terrorist when in fact it could be someone fleeing from something, or someone who just got lost. So, they need to be able to assess that. Then, you got to know whom to contact to help. The UNHCR needs to transfer to the hospital, the Red Cross, Civil Defense. So, that's what we are working on with them. To create that kind of matrix.'[308]

This idea of 'matrix' strongly falls within the paradigm of migration management: Syrian migrants should be categorised between security threats, humanitarian cases, migrant workers, etc. Such logic puts the ICMPD's rationale in clear conflict with the UNHCR's position that Syrians arriving to Lebanon should be treated as refugees *prima facie*. Overall, this vision conceals and depoliticises the circumstances of the Syrian war as well as the historically fluid patterns of human mobility between Lebanon and Syria.

---

[308] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, January 2019.

B) A congruence with Lebanese authorities: the integration of the difference between refugee and migrants, and the illegalisation of Syrian displacement

I posit that the turning point in the GoL's Syrian response from 2014 onwards prompted the Lebanese administration to discursively embrace the paradigm of migration management. The sudden rejection of the Syrian presence in Lebanon spurred the rhetoric that Lebanon had to select Syrians staying in Lebanon to assert its sovereignty. I mentioned in chapter one that the 'October policies' encapsulated measures designed to halt the Syrian inflow, illegalise the Syrian presence, encourage them to return, and monitor and control the presence of those already living in Lebanon. The legal framework governing their presence shifted from a preferential to a discriminatory regime with the imposition of the *kafala* system imposed upon Syrian nationals, or another of the eleven visa categories, including the humanitarian visa limited to highly specific cases. My contention is that the discursive legitimisation by the Lebanese authorities and security agencies of this policy shift capitalised on the paradigm of migration management. Indeed, the new system put in place from 2015 onwards limited Syrians to two main legal solutions for their stay in Lebanon: either being registered by the UNHCR, which forbids them from working, or staying in Lebanon as a migrant worker, which denies them the right to be registered with the UNHCR and benefit from international assistance. This configuration echoes a mentality of migration management, with the key distinction between refugees and migrant workers. The essentialisation of the distinction between Syrian refugees and migrant workers, and the assumption that Syrians need to choose between receiving international assistance and working (and that many were illegally doing both) is commonplace in Lebanon, as captured by this quote from a representative of the Customs:

'We cannot stop refugees from entering in Lebanon. They started working here, they made a lot of problems with the Lebanese. The Lebanese started complaining. These are not refugees! You cannot work and then get money from the EU, the UN or whatever. You cannot work and be a refugee. Syrians get one hundred dollars from the UN, food tickets and then they go to open their shop, or to their construction site… They make

money, they earn 300, 400 dollars, and then they get 100 from the UN! These are migrants, not refugees.'[309]

'Here, the Syrians are well integrated, they work, they have their business, they are connected, and they receive money from the UN, while the Lebanese who don't have jobs, they get nothing. The UN should be clear, either you are working, and then you are not a refugee, you don't receive aid, or you are not working.'[310]

Akoka (2020) has examined the contingent nature of the construction of the dichotomy between refugee and migrant in Western Europe and its historical circumstances, as well as its subsequent adoption by the UNHCR and other IOs. Her work aptly illustrates the depoliticising effects of this paradigm with the division of migrants into categories having corresponding policy prescriptions. These are presented as universal but are, in reality, deeply ingrained in European history and the political interest of Western governments. In Lebanon and Syria, they did not exist before the Syrian war and they do not grasp the complexity of the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

I have observed striking similarities between the patterns of speech expressed by European officials and by Lebanese authorities to legitimise this new border arrangement. Indeed, the idea of legitimate/legal and illegitimate/illegal travel permeates discourses surrounding the Syrian presence in Lebanon:

'The Lebanese authorities cannot really monitor illegal migrants, on the roads from the Beqaa, we cannot stop them, and we cannot close these illegal crossing points. But we are trying. Goods are coming from there; illegal Syrians are coming. There is no control, it is Hezbollah-controlled with the Syrian regime on the other side. At the same time, there was no political decision to fully close the border, even in 2014-15. It closed between Syria and Jordan. Syria and Iraq. But not between Syria and Lebanon.'[311]

---

[309] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.

[310] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, November 2018.

[311] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, November 2018.

The diffusion of the ICMPD's frames of thoughts has accompanied, legitimised and sharpened the cognitive shift surrounding Lebanon's role in ordering flows of migrants. The following quote captures this learning process:

> 'In Beqaa, we have illegal crossing points. It is possible to enter from there, but they are not allowed to. It is Hezbollah-led, with the Syrian regime on the other side. This is very political. We need to stop these irregular flows, we need to improve our border for the sake of our sovereignty. We see how they do in Europe during study visits.'[312]

By revealing the circulation of repertoires, discourses and rationality of migration management between European and Lebanese representatives, these findings enter in contradiction with the idea of a mere top-down approach in migration management: in this case, the ICMPD comes to support the personal agenda of recipients.

C) The sedentary bias

In the same vein as IOs such as the UNHCR and the IOM, the ICMPD's rationality is based on a 'sedentary bias' (Bakewell 2002), a powerfully depoliticising preconception that essentialises the link between Syrians and their nation-states, and conceives of mobility either as an abnormality or as the symptom of a problem. This perspective is structurally limiting to grasp empirical patterns of Syrian circulations in Lebanon, social and family ties – where migration has represented, for generations, a livelihood strategy that is not necessarily symptomatic of a 'problem'[313] – and obliterates the political circumstances of the Syrian conflict. However, I posit that this sedentary bias has become a keystone of the *episteme* of national and international security professionals in Lebanon.

First, this 'bias' translates in the idea that Syrian refugees living in Lebanon should not be allowed to go back and forth between Lebanon and Syria, as expressed by this quote from a

---

[312] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.
[313] As mentioned before, during the 1990s, roughly 500,000 Syrian workers (mainly in the agricultural and construction sectors) benefited from freedom of movement to Lebanon (Chalcraft 2008). This pre-conflict anchoring has had a strong influence on exile routes and strategies.

Colonel from the Maritime Customs: 'they can go back and come back! Come on, these are not refugees. If you go back to Syria, you cannot come back to Lebanon, you are not a refugee anymore.'[314]

In 2020, the juncture between the economic and social crisis and the pandemic prompted a shift among security agencies, which went from a logic of monitoring circulations to a logic of pushing Syrians to leave 'by all possible means' (Stel 2020: 72). The GSO thus lifted the 200 USD waiver that was until then requested to exit the Lebanese territory.

'Legally, the GSO has to monitor Syrians going back and forth for the Lebanese authorities, that's their job. But now, their logic is more to encourage them to leave definitively, with no possibility of going back. And if you believe what they say, they have repatriated something like 80.000 back to Syria. […] So, I think pragmatism is the rule for GSO, they try to make them leave by all means.'[315]

However, the (newly) definitive character of exit from Lebanon has discouraged many Syrians from leaving. Therefore, the GSO policies have also had the ultimate effect of deterring Syrians from leaving and pushing them to sedentarise in Lebanon. A representative of the GSO expressed this logic of 'immobilisation' during and after the COVID-19 pandemic:[316]

'Now, we facilitate the exit of Syrians. No, sorry, we 'encourage' since a few months. Before, they had to pay a tax, but now, nothing. However, the exit is now definite. They cannot come back after. So now, they don't leave anymore, they don't want to. The regime does not want them to come back and they don't want to return. So very few of them are taking the exit, as now this is a definite one.'[317]

In addition, the sendentary bias translates in the conviction that refugee return to Syria should be the ultimate prospect. We saw in the previous chapter that the entrenchment of this sedentary order was facilitated by the fragmentation of return initiatives and the assertion of the 'voluntary' character of return even by humanitarian agencies. Lebanese authorities, including

---

[314] Interview with a representative of the Customs administration, Beirut, December 2018.
[315] Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018.
[316] Interview with a representative of GSO, Beirut, October 2021.
[317] Interview with a representative of GSO, Beirut, October 2021.

representatives of the Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, and the GSO, organised some such returns[318] (Mhaissen & Hodges 2019), and in 2019, the GSO implemented a decree leading to the deportation of Syrians who crossed the border with Lebanon 'illegally' after the month of April 2019. In border areas, the GSO and Hezbollah have been implementing a mix of regulatory and coercive measures such as intimidation tactics so as to push Syrians to return:

> 'In Aarsal, they closed the GSO office, they said that this was temporary, but in reality, it was to prevent Syrians living there from renewing their residency permit for free. This way, they prevent them from moving inside Lebanon. Their goal is to pressure them to leave.'[319]

> 'All these actions have to be read in light of the political statements of Lebanon. The Beqaa is Hezbollah area. From the Hezbollah, the idea is to show its control in the Beqaa, in border areas. So, they close shops owned by Syrians. It always goes back to this double message: we don't do *refoulement,* but we will try as much as possible to make Syrians leave.'

D) Illegalisation of border crossings and heightened level of unsafety

The militarisation of the border has pushed refugees to resort to smugglers and has rendered irregular cross-border trails increasingly unsafe, towards more mountainous and dangerous areas. According to interviewees, despite increased border patrolling, watchtowers, etc., 'smugglers will always find a way'.[320] There are no official statistics but humanitarian workers operating in those areas reported increased illegal border crossings:

---

[318] Estimates very between 63,752 returns since 2016 (UNHCR, 2021) and 390,000 according to the government (Sewell, 2020).
[319] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.
[320] Interview with a representative of the Customs, Beirut, January 2019.

'Recently, eighteen Syrians died in the mountains because they crossed during a storm. They froze. Plus, there are landmines on the Syrian side. They go thanks to illegal smugglers. Now, they have to cross on those death roads […] because of the work of the Army, there are very few illegal crossing points now. The remaining ones are located in the most dangerous and mountainous area.'[321]

'If a Syrian is living here in Lebanon without a work permit, and he wants to go back and visit its family, he cannot pass by the border. Because he was here illegally. So he has to pay 500 dollars to the smugglers to take him to Syria, and then 500 dollars to go back to Lebanon. This is another source of income. Opportunistic people take advantage of this in a criminal way.'[322]

'I know the border in the Beqaa is now much more controlled than what it used to be. It used to be much easier for people to go through non-official crossing point because the Lebanese army wasn't present on the field or efficient. But now, they have more capacity and even for Syrians to go to Lebanon, you need to fall into one of the new categories, so if you don't have money, you don't have the employer, you might go through irregular roads at some point.'[323]

'You may have people who return to Syria not through GSO. They just decided to go back to Syria. And they don't want to be excluded by the UN system. So, they go with a smuggler.'[324]

---

[321] Interview with a representative of UNHCR, Zahle, December 2018. See also: Al Jazeera, "Refugees found frozen in Lebanon near Syria border ", Website, *Al Jazeera News,* 19 January 2018, available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/refugees-frozen-lebanon-syria-border-180119180011632.htm [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

[322] Interview with a former representative of Muslim Aid, Arsaal, November 2019.

[323] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.

[324] Interview with a representative of the Qatari Red Crescent, Arsaal, November 2019.

E) Securitisation by the Lebanese authorities: a disruption of the migration management discourse

I end this section by showing that ultimately, the Lebanese authorities' overt securitisation of Syrian mobility comes in contradiction with the paradigm of migration management. Indeed, the literature has shown that the paradigm of migration management strives to move away from construction of migration as a security threat to states, towards the core proposition that all states can benefit from migration if it is managed in an orderly manner (Geiger & Pecoud 2013 & 2020). In this scenario, migration IOs veers away from the security orientation favoured by states.

The issues of terrorism and insecurity at the border along with ISIS effective control of Aarsal between 2014 and 2017 (with the area being classified as 'international conflict zone') figures prominently on both domestic and international agendas and have created a momentum for enhanced security thwarted in favour of the LAF. The description of the context by a representative of the ICRC illustrates this climate of security emergency:

> 'In 2014, the sub-delegation [of the ICRC in Zahle] opened its door, because there was a very high concentration of refugees and of Syrian fighters. We saw a massive influx of both of them, and the border closed for obvious security reasons. So, we decided to open this subdelegation which, today, is very young, it is only four years old, but it grew up very quickly, because of this security and humanitarian emergency.'[325]

Lebanese officials often conflated Syrian refugees and terrorists in their discourses. For instance, a representative of the GSO said that 'the reason why there are very few boats leaving Lebanon, is because the Lebanese Army works enormously on counterterrorism, to prevent those from leaving […] the risk of foreign fighters leaving to go to Europe is very high'.[326] Such securitisation is highly present in Lebanese media and the GOL's official statements as well. Beyond the discursive level, there are several indications that Lebanese security entities have

---

[325] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.
[326] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, October 2021.

applied a purely security lens to border management. We mentioned that the GSO implemented coercive measures to prompt Syrian return to Syria:

'The GSO provoked mass arrests in Arsaal and other locations in the Beqaa last week. The timing is very important: they want refugees to leave. For the first time, they arrested women as well, but they were released the same day. They want to scare them. Last week, there were threats that they would demolish camps. They also threatened to close shops held by Syrians. They have done that in the past. Everything arrives at the same time; it gives the impression that the political will behind this is to show that here it goes, it's enough, 'leave!''[327]

'For the GoL, refugees should leave ASAP. All of them, even the one registered with UNHCR. But they cannot kick them out. So, they build a coercive environment, for instance, they need to go through the checkpoints in order to reach the clinic or to get this paper, they make things impossible for them. And at checkpoints, they end up in jail, beaten, threatened, released two days after… Their vulnerability has increased. The government wants to make them unsafe, so that, at the end, they decide to go back to Syria.'[328]

The strengthening of the Syrian-Lebanese border was thus praised by Lebanese actors as a 'security success' but with dire humanitarian consequences:

'Security-wise for the country, these border policies are good. Now, every one or two kilometres, you have a watchtower… This has given Lebanon the opportunity to defend its borders. But from a humanitarian point of view, it would have been better to ease the crossing of refugees who want to seek asylum in Lebanon.'[329]

In the last section of this chapter, I show that the ICMPD positions itself as the 'nice guy' who distances itself from overtly political and security discourses, asserting the importance of a protection and humanitarian prism and a preference for technical, humanitarian discourses which it presents as apolitical.

---

[327] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.
[328] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.
[329] Interview with a representative of UNHCR, Zahle, December 2018.

<div align="center">*</div>

In this section, I have argued that the paradigm of migration management has been accepted and even instrumentalised by Lebanese state officials for their own benefits, helping them discursively legitimise their policies of increased control. These findings resonate with the argument of Dini (2018 & 2021) about the IOM: rather than supporting migrants, the organisation interferes in processes of state-building by influencing the way national governments treat citizens. It also confirms the idea that for top-down processes to work, local authorities need to be given meaning and a purpose for what they are doing. In Lebanon, the diffusion of norms carried out by the ICMPD was effective because the domestic conditions favoured their translation. In addition, Lebanese authorities have instrumentalised the rhetoric of migration management to actually go beyond this logic and implement a purely security-infused agenda. Therefore, this section allows to nuance top-down disciplining dynamics in which states internalise the norms of well-governed migration. I now turn to the interweaving of the dual logics of humanitarianism and containment.

IV. <u>Depoliticisation tactics: a rhetoric of humanitarianism, human rights and community participation</u>

This section focuses on the role of the ICMPD in putting forward a humanitarian and human rights rationality to the governance of borders, as well as a consensual and migrant-friendly rhetoric. A breadth of studies has revealed the humanitarianism of migration control (Walters 2015) and its depoliticising effects (Cuttita 2018), with the expression of the dualisms of the 'threatened and the threatening' or 'risky and at-risk' (Agier 2011; Scheel & Ratfisch 2014). The entrenchment of dynamics of care and control gives the illusion that migration management works for the benefits of all, allowing for a 'triple win': that of the sending state, the receiving state and migrants (Pécoud 2011). This way, the ICMPD boosts its image in front of Lebanese administrations but also foreign donors. In this section, I show how this organisation reproduces the political rationality of the humanitarian border as a vulnerable site. Second, I emphasise a human rights rhetoric addressing cross-border smugglers as the main culprits of border deaths.

Finally, I contend that the ICMPD depoliticises its interventions by promoting a bottom-up approach enhancing the role of local communities in bordering processes; a depoliticising process that conceals power structures.

A) The construction of the border as a vulnerable site

The dual logic of care and control at the border reflects a world in which the distinction between controlling and protecting people is fading away (Agier 2011). Over the years, the ICMPD has sharpened the humanitarian angle in its border management portfolio, in particular with the involvement of Switzerland, which has funded many training and capacity-building activities on 'gender mainstreaming', 'human rights at the border', 'emergency medical response', etc. These activities have progressively integrated mental health components ('trauma response', etc.) and search and rescue activities at the maritime border. In October 2021, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration funded a two-year project entitled 'supporting Lebanon in Fostering Human Rights-based Border and Migration Management', which 'aims to enhance capacities of Lebanese security agencies to implement a rights-based and gender-sensitive approach to border and migration management'. In its communication, the project advertises a holistic approach that put forward vague and consensual objectives such as 'national stability' and 'social cohesion'.[330] In conversations, the terminology of vulnerability was often emphasised as a powerful force in feeding and framing a mentality of border management. Such approach legitimises European interventions, as captured by this quote from a retired General from the GSO:

> 'The Swiss have given training in human rights, gender and vulnerable cases for the
> military and General Security. It is important, because these people, their focus is purely
> about security, they don't think about vulnerability. So, let's say, there is an extended
> Syrian family with newborns at the border crossing. While their case is being sorted out,
> they need to be taken care of. So now, the military, the General Security, they have a
> big room at their disposal to host them, and the Swiss also trained them, so they know

---

[330] Source : ICMPD website, available at: https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/swiss-support-to-integrated-border-management-in-lebanon-phase-ii; Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon, Beirut, November 2018 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

how they treat these cases. When a woman is pregnant, they are also taught to treat her differently. This is all new, and the Swiss have been really pro-active in enhancing these human rights issues.'[331]

This falls in line with the holistic approach of humanitarian border management diffused by migration IOs, mapping out technologies, institutional arrangements and resources structuring activities following a rationality of a humanitarian border (Scherf 2020; Frowd 2018); a concept that seeks to reconcile humanitarian protection obligations towards migrants with border control security.

The humanitarianisation of border control also entails enhanced cooperation with humanitarian actors such as the Civil Defense and the Lebanese Red Cross through joint training activities and seminars. The co-optation of humanitarian actors in border policies is a well-documented strategy of border management (Scalettaris 2018; Larzillère 2010; Scheel & Ratfisch 2014). In June 2019, the Swiss Support conducting a three-day workshop on 'human rights and immigration detention', with interveners from the ILO, the ICRC, Caritas and the Human Rights Institute, designed for the GSO, the ISF and the Army. The sessions addressed topics such as the design of standard operating procedures on the human rights dimensions at borders, immigration detention, how to take care of vulnerable cases, human rights in rescue situation, how to address cases of pregnant women and newborns, gender awareness modules, the gender effects of COVID-19, etc.[332] This humanitarian-security nexus was praised by NGO workers:

'It is good, that we are involved in this security sector. It cannot be purely that or purely that. We needed this international body to bring those two entities together. Usually, let's say, the defence attaché deals with security people and the human rights attaché with NGOs. But it does not work like that. Because they commit human rights violations, and one needs to assess that. They need to do security sector reform in a human rights way, because it is also a security issue. What we need is the EU, all donors, to gather together people in the humanitarian and security sectors working at the border. You can do a humanitarian response that is security-conscious and you can do a security response that is humanitarian-conscious. But you have to bring us together. The ICMPD

[331] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, October 2021.
[332] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, October 2019.

is like an interpreter, who speak both languages.'[333]

The surveillance of the violation of human rights by Lebanese security agencies is another manifestation of this logic of care and control:

> 'We are on the field also to monitor whether there is any violation of human rights by security agencies. For instance, if there are forced evictions, human rights abuse, etc. We are on the ground, we check that the Army, the GSO, sometimes the Customs, don't do any harm to the refugees. We don't deal with the rest, whether there are forced or that, for this, this is the political team you should talk to, they handle the political dialogue point of view, but we handle the human rights one.'[334]

As another illustration of the humanitarian border as the locus for 'care and control', the UNHCR has also played a role in deterrence: in January 2022, the agency posted a message in Arabic on Facebook and Twitter, warning refugees against the danger of departures from the coastline to Cyprus. It was addressed to both the Syrian and the Lebanese population and met with strong backlash. Such co-optation of non-security actors in deterrence and awareness campaigns has been shown in the literature (Pecoud, 2010; Van Hessel, 2021; Rodriguez, 2019; Dini & Giusa, 2020).

B) A human rights rhetoric of fighting smuggling in the context of the Syrian 'crisis'

The literature on migration IOs has emphasised the importance of the 'trafficking paradigm', a state-driven narrative that establishes the smugglers as the main culprits of illegal border crossing and border deaths, thereby putting forth anti-trafficking as a consensual goal (Pécoud 2015: 121; Miramond 2020). The capitalisation of IOs on countertrafficking initiatives – in particular the IOM, but also the ICMPD that has integrated them in its portfolio since the early 2000s – has been analysed by the literature through the lens of Foucault's theory of discursive power grounded in its conception of disciplinary processes. This body of research highlights

---

[333] Interview with a representative of a human rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[334] Interview with a security officer of the EU Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, September 2018.

the new 'global migration narrative' that the IOM has helped to construct (Geiger 2013), and the hypervisibility it offers to human trafficking at the expense of abuses of power and social rights. Smugglers are designated as scapegoats for the structural causes leading to migration movements, which allows to gather and federate all actors around this 'universal enemy'.

Several Lebanese organisations such as KAFA or the Legal Agenda have raised awareness on the issue of human trafficking, concerning migrants from Asia, Africa and, increasingly, Syria, Iraq and Palestine, and taking the form of domestic servitude, child labour, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, exploitation through begging and slavery, etc. Trafficking is underpinned by the exploitative *kafala* system and the use of 'artist visas' to enter Lebanon.[335] Reports and legal professionals have shown that human trafficking of Syrian refugees is not directly linked to cross-border smuggling as the majority of trafficking happens to refugees that have already settled in the community; further, most trafficking does not happen in highly organised criminal networks but takes place at a lower level, i.e. in the family or the neighbourhood.[336]

However, the ICMPD promptly established a link between the Syrian crisis, cross-border movements and anti-trafficking. After the anti-trafficking 'TELAE' project funded in 2010 by the US Department of State (ICMPD 2013), the organisation launched a regional initiative for 'empirical research on the phenomenon of human trafficking in dynamic mixed migration contexts and humanitarian crisis since 2014 in order to increase, and enhanced the accuracy of, the knowledge based on how trafficking affects people who migrant or refuges', with a clear focus on the Syrian 'crisis' (Haley 2015 & 2016).[337] In reports, the organisation raised the alarm: after recalling that migrant smuggling has been on the rise since Syrians need a visa to pass the border, along with substantial increase in irregular crossing (Haley 2016: 3), it insisted that such irregular crossings are a 'concern for trafficking' as it is becoming a cross-border phenomenon and migrant smuggling as a means to recruit could turn into trafficking (Haley 2015 & 2016; ICMPD 2021). The following excerpt from the report captures the fear of Syrians leaving to Europe:

---

335 Sources: KAFA and the Legal Agenda websites, see: https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/176
https://english.legal-agenda.com/topics/equality/asylum-migration-and-human-trafficking/ [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
336 Interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
337 Source: ICMPD website. See: https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/capacity-building/anti-trafficking-programme [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

'Due to the current situation of Syrian IDPs and refugees in the countries under study, as well as the lack of prospects for improvement in these conditions in the near future, some refugees and displaced people have started to move onto countries outside the region, particularly EUMS. While they are still within the five countries, the need to pay substantial sums of money – and possibly become indebted – to facilitators of internal movement and migrant smugglers in order to move further afield is causing people to resort to risky methods of obtaining that money, rendering them vulnerable to trafficking. For those who leave the countries under study in order to seek asylum in an EU country, there is no safe and regular method of travelling.' (Haley 2015: 210).

During interviews, migrant smugglers and traffickers were often conflated. For instance, an EU security officer said that:

'In Syria, you have Bedouin groups that transport people through the desert. And then, smugglers help them pass the border at one of the non-official BCPs. And they ask for bribes, money. And then the smuggler asks for more than planned, and this indebts the family, which in return forces them to do child labour, prostitution. This is a very typical and systemic problem.' [338]

Anti-trafficking rhetoric feeds on the securitisation of Lebanon's porous borderland in Akkar and Hermel-Baalbeck where smuggling is a cornerstone of the economy; areas perceived as lawless lands where jihadist movements and foreign fighters prosper: 'thanks to connections at border crossing points, it can be relatively easy for militants with strong links to the Assad regime to cross the border and smuggle abducted people into Syria' (Healy 2015: 124). In this scenario, fighting against cross-border trafficking of migrants is encapsulated in a bigger challenge against the hybridity and lawlessness of these zones: 'there are no rules there. This is a feeding ground for anti-traffickers […]. There is Hezbollah, no Army, smugglers do whatever they want'.[339]

Ultimately, this anti-trafficking narrative serves the expansion of the ICMPD's agenda of border management. In Lebanon, anti-trafficking law no. 164 provides the legal basis for a

[338] Interview with a representative of the EU Delegation, Beirut, September 2021.
[339] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, January 2019.

response but the country lacks specific anti-trafficking institutional structures. Most of the anti-trafficking work has been carried out by civil society organisations and militant initiatives, generally working towards abolishing the kafala system. The ICMPD's efforts focused on data gathering and training for border authorities (for instance, in accompanied children, border controls of family ties, etc.). In its report, it advises that:

> 'Bearing in mind that Lebanon is mostly a country of destination for trafficked persons and the majority of human trafficking cases are transborder, it is of utmost importance that not only national but also cross-border cooperation is in place in order to ensure a comprehensive anti-trafficking response' (ICMPD 2013: 70).

This quote captures the ICMPD's anti-trafficking narrative in Lebanon:

> 'The Customs are good, but they lack equipment to fight smuggling. Smuggling, dismantling networks, this should all be a natural part of border management, but given to jurisdiction, to sovereignty, it is complicated for us to intervene. The Lebanese have good intelligence capacities though, but it is not enough. They need training, capacity-building, etc. It is a thing we want to come to the fore in the next EU meetings. The EU is more interested by the maritime border; we want to show them that the smuggling happens at the land border too.'[340]

C) A top-down approach and a rhetoric of empowerment: the co-optation of local communities in bordering processes

In addition, the ICMPD depoliticises its interventions by promoting a bottom-up approach, through the enhancement of the role of local communities in bordering processes in Akkar and Beqaa. In reports, the ICMPD expresses the view that the population living in these areas is refractory to bordering processes due to the hybridity and blurred sovereignties of these borderlands, as well as to the overall authority of state actors, as this population favours family and local affinities (cf. Chatty, Mansour & Yassin 2013; Picard 2016). In a 2021 report, the

---

[340] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, November 2018.

ICMPD notes that in these regions, the power of clan affiliations, political groups, Hezbollah, nuance or even interfere with that of official representatives of the state such as the LAF or the ISF: 'clan affiliations are stronger than affiliation to any other group or identity, especially since they come with a factor of security and protection' (20) and 'the influence of the Lebanese Army remains shy in Baalbek El-Hermel in comparison to other areas in the country amid the strong presence of powerful armed parties like Hezbollah and clans' (ICMPD 2021: 21). Furthermore, 'most smugglers in Baalbek El-Hermel are protected by powerful clans as well as Hezbollah and its affiliates' (34).

According to an ICMPD officer 'in Baalbek El-Hermel border areas, the army has limited influence and role in overseeing or interfering in smuggling operations. Most smugglers in Baalbek El-Hermel are protected by powerful clans as well as Hezbollah and its affiliates'.[341] The ICMPD thus emphasises the crucial role of communities in contributing to bordering processes, by 'pushing civilians to pass by official border posts, improve their relations with these authorities, and take action in border management and surveillance'. These community-based practices shift the policy methods of this organisation, towards more inclusive, participatory and relational practices.

> 'Now, we have a project of border communities to favor military and civilian cooperation. We go to the remote corners of Akkar, Baalbeck, and we hold workshops with the Lebanese Army and security services, and we offer civilians to join these workshops, to facilitate the dialogue. We choose pilot villages due to their high concentration of Syrians located near the border, in Akkar, Maaraboun, Maadiye. We involve the GSO and the Army: we explain to civilians their roles, what do they do, to get them accustomed to communicating with them. The municipality, religious authorities, be they Christians or Muslims also participate. We want communities to improve their understanding of military processes and of the role of the military, especially as border communities have a complicated relationship with the military.'[342]

These 'border communities' are a tool in the legitimisation of border management policies, as they aim to foster engagement and bring political support and momentum to these bordering

---

[341] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, January 2019.
[342] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, October 2021.

processes. This participatory approach (implemented through the co-optation of 'key community individuals' so they would 'initiate awareness, outreach and preparedness programmes') seemingly represents a move away from ordinary, pre-packaged ones with emphasis on top-down behavioural change. Ultimately, this is done to raise the profile of state agencies at the border and legitimise ICMPD interventions on the ground.

> 'The ultimate goal is to improve relations and in particular to push civilians, including Syrians, to pass by the border posts, to address the authorities, and not to cross the border illegally. But the goal is also to empower local leaders and communities to take action in border management, turning them into social mobilisers for communicating risk and recording cross-border mobility patterns.'[343]

> 'As local people feel more secure, they become more willing to take development initiatives and investments, and if security actually improves, they are less likely to suffer setbacks due to robbery, violence, or intimidation. If the Lebanese Armed Forces, Internal Security Forces and General Security successfully improve community security and enhance relations with local communities, they will contribute to local development.' (ICMPD 2021: 33).

<center>*</center>

Humanitarianism acts as a legitimising frame to expand borderwork, as it conceals the exclusionary, policing logics and human rights violations linked to border management. This boosts the ICMPD's profile and asserts its hegemony: it enables it to speak to different audiences and align itself to the interests of a wide range of partners. Further, by promoting community-based practices, the ICMPD has shifted its policy methods towards more inclusive locally grounded and relational practices. This apparent empowerment of local actors is depoliticising as it attempts to hide existing power imbalances.

---

[343] Interview with a representative of the ICMPD, Beirut, October 2021.

Conclusion:

This chapter aims to unravel the depoliticisation of international border interventions in the framework of the Syrian 'crisis' in Lebanon. I have shed light on the problematisation of Lebanon's border governance by foreign actors through a process of securitisation and the deployment of a paradigm of migration management, and their effects on Syrian mobility. My main argument is that the ICMPD technicises Lebanon's border assemblage by framing it as a symptom of state weakness and absence of sovereignty, and not as the result of historical cross-border circulations. This technical interpretation is a form of depoliticisation as it fixes issues in a context of technical limitations while avoiding putting them into politics. The fact that the ICMPD supports a state-driven model makes this diagnosis of state weakness all the more crucial for the legitimatisation of its interventions: the ICMPD needs a state to act upon.

First, I have attempted to characterise Lebanon's border assemblage. In particular, the Lebanon-Syria border is a 'quasi-border' (Picard 2016: 358) with patterns of porousness and hybrid sovereignty defying conventional expectations based on the nation-state. Then, I have pointed to the prevalence of externalisation logics, discourses and frames: Lebanon is embedded in a European agenda of externalisation of migratory controls as the idea of potential spillover and Syrian arrivals largely permeates discourses legitimising border interventions.

I have examined the depoliticised practices and rationalisation techniques of the ICMPD's mode of governance. The first step is the elaboration of a diagnosis: European security professionals have interpreted Lebanon's border assemblage as symptomatic of a weak and unfinished nation-state plagued by sectarian divisions. The second one is the promotion of the ICMPD's role: first as a neutral facilitator which enables to bring all the participants to the table and thus overcomes sectarian divides; second, as a broker of neutral knowledge and depoliticised expertise. This way, under the guise of neutrality and alleged objectivity, the IO promotes a vision that is in reality deeply infused by a situated European expertise and conception of migration management.

Then, I have argued that the paradigm of migration management has been accepted and even instrumentalised by Lebanese state officials for their own benefits: in particular, the distinction between refugee and migrants and the sedentary bias have ultimately helped them discursively legitimise their policies of increased control. The Lebanese authorities' overt securitisation of

Syrian mobility comes in contradiction with the paradigm of migration management. This research thus opens up new ways to analyse power dynamics between migration IOs and Southern recipients of funds, by showing how the former come to support the personal agenda of the latter in contradiction with a mere top-down approach.

In the last section, I have focused on depoliticisation tactics put forward by the ICMPD, including the promotion of a humanitarian and human rights rationality to the governance of borders, and of a bottom-up approach enhancing the role of local communities in bordering processes; a depoliticising process that conceals power structures.

Chapter two and chapter three have examined the nuances of depoliticisation mobilised by international actors, respectively the UNHCR for humanitarian governance, and the ICMPD for border and security governance. Chapter four examines the dynamics of repoliticisation of the refugee regime in Lebanon.

Chapter four: Repoliticisation: reactivating the political character of refugee governance

This chapter examines the dynamics of repoliticisation of the refugee regime in Lebanon. The previous chapters have pointed to the depoliticisation of organisations such as the UNHCR and the ICMPD, with the political neutralisation of their role and the promotion of their expertise as means of apolitical self-legitimisation. However, depoliticisation does not mean that the work of IOs has become any less political, but rather that it has been transferred to a less obviously politicised arena of governance (Fawcett et al. 2017: 17; Petiteville 2017 a & b; Stone 2017; Hay 2014). Therefore, 'repoliticisation' as the process through which 'contingency, deliberation and choice are revealed in processes of decision-making' (Fawcett et al. 2017: 289) highlights these political interests. Repoliticisation 'involves the reaffirmation of the undecidable, contingent, and contestable character of the meanings and identities that make up our social, economic, and political lifeworlds' (*ibid*.: 32). If depoliticising means obscuring, repoliticisation 'reactivates the political origin of the social' (*ibid.*: 32) by reasserting the conflictual nature of politics and 'demonstrat[ing] a form of critical awareness of the political character of policy decisions made by state authorities in a manner that disrupts the continuation of power politics' (Torfing 1999, cited in Fawcett et al. 2017: 32).

This chapter also draws on the literature on politicisation, a concept that slightly differs from repoliticisation as it refers to the activation of a political element that has not been previously negated. In this context, politicisation involves two operational criteria: first, widespread societal awareness of international institutions, including the formation of diverging demands and the expression of various concerns regarding these institutions; second, the public mobilisation of these demands and concerns, that is, the contestation of international institutional policies or procedures by actors, in virtue of competing preferences uttered in the public realm (Zürn, Binder & Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012). Mérand (2022: 846) analyses politicisation as a political strategy (rather than process) in the EU context, 'an outcome of political work, the practice of carving out a space for agency in an environment that is constrained by institutional rules and intergovernmental power structures'. His argument suggests two

practices of politicisation at play: first, the purposeful exercise of political discretion vis-à-vis institutional rules; and second, the embrace of ideological and partisan conflict.[344]

The literature on repoliticisation – still relatively sparse – epitomises the heterogenous nature of this concept, which calls for a definition with variable geometry and several different scales. First, it emphasises that repoliticisation is intrinsically a discursive process or a category of analysis. Governance practices are neither inherently or concretely depoliticising nor inherently repoliticising phenomena, as much as they depend on how governance is conceived (Jenkins 2011): 'in short, it is the discursive construction of 'governance' […] and the way it spills over into public political debates, and not the concrete practices of governance and meta-governance, that determine the degree of depoliticisation and repoliticisation' (Sorensen & Torfing 2017: 30). A stake is politicised when it generates a visible cleavage in the political community, bringing actors and citizens to clarify their positions, or to polarise themselves around these (Petiteville 2017a; Maertens & Parizet 2017).

A large strand of literature on (re)politicisation highlights the recent politicisation of international institutions explained by 'growing public awareness of international institutions and increased public mobilisation of competing political preferences regarding institutions' policies or procedures' (Zürn et al. 2012: 71); this process occurs inside or outside the IOs once the issues they have dealt with are grasped by governments and civil societies. In other words, the debates, controversies and conflicts that IOs have attempted to neutralise through ethical norms, depoliticised discourse, and expertise may just have been *displaced* into the international society. A body of work has focused on the EU as a prime example of transnationalisation of public space (Kriesi 2016; Hutter, Grande, & Kriesi 2016; De Wilde & Zürn 2012), on the collective mobilisation of civil society actors to contest IO policies in the framework of anti-globalisation movements (for instance, Stone 2017) and against the 'development narrative' of IOs (for instance, Carbone 2012).

The topic of refugees has always been politicised, with countries hosting refugees according to their ideological preferences since the UNHCR's inception (Betts, Loescher & Milner 2012). The agency has always had to compose with geopolitical contexts while attempting to apply universal norms. Based on an ethnographic study of the OFRPA's archives, Akoka (2020) has

---

[344] This conceptualisation is based on an ethnographic analysis of the Juncker Commission's implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact in Italy, Spain, and Portugal in 2015–2017.

shown that during the Cold War in France, the right of asylum was granted to asylum-seekers depending on diplomatic considerations and ideological preferences of the French government and officials from the OFPRA. This logic still pervades today's migration policies. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in March 2022, European governments have vowed to host Ukrainian refugees, thus showing their opposition to the war led by the Russian government. Brazil's promise to receive refugees fleeing from Venezuela also illustrates this logic, as this was a way for the President to oppose the Venezuelan's government.

A few studies have offered a dialectical interpretation of the relation between depoliticisation and repoliticisation: according to Fawcett & Marsh (2014), repoliticisation operates in tandem with dynamics of depoliticisation where direct control over policy processes is wrested back via either direct or indirect means. As Flinders & Buller (2006: 297), citing Rancière (1995), summarise: 'politics is thus constituted […] by an essential tension between depoliticising and repoliticising tendencies, as competing elites seek to shift certain issues either within or beyond the boundaries of conventional visible politics'. Thus, depoliticisation and repoliticisation are inherently diffuse movements that seem to coexist in shifting balances, with frequent pendulum swings that give either depoliticisation or repoliticisation the upper hand (Sorensen & Torfing 2017).

Beyond being a category of analysis, repoliticisation is also a category of practices. Cuttitta (2018) has analysed whether search-and-rescue NGOs in the Central Mediterranean are doing not only humanitarian but also political borderwork, and, if so, to what extent they are actually repoliticising the EU border, following Bourdieu's exhortation to restore 'political thinking and action' against the policy of depoliticisation (Bourdieu 2002: 31; cited in Cuttitta 2018). Cuttitta has argued that their role 'fluctuates between depoliticisation and repoliticisation' (634), drawing attention to different degrees of 'political positioning' that move between silence and open, vocal criticism towards current migration and border policies. Thus, some practices – such as campaigning against current EU border policies or promoting an alternative image of migration – are clearly political acts, despite their outcomes being hardly measurable and possibly very limited.[345]

---

[345] On the one hand, NGOs repoliticise migration and border management by 'questioning, influencing and contrasting governmental policies', (rethinking migration policy and challenging established categories dividing migrants, rejecting state funding, pressuring politicians, etc). On the other hand, they 'contribute to the

Politics is inherent to the work of aid organisations because it cannot be separated from the strategic use states make of them (Louis & Maertens 2021; Devin 2017). Petiteville (2017a: 9) has theorised the 'resilience of politics': 'we argue that politicisation is resilient in and out IOs […] because IOs cannot totally eliminate political controversy and debates [and] international organisations are not able to avoid the resilient forms of politicisation linked to the issues they deal with'. In particular, refugee governance can never be entirely non-political and the protection and repatriation of refugees are highly politicised. The UNHCR has been studied as an instrument used by donor states to meet their own interests (Fresia 2013), its reliance on annual voluntary funds constraining its ability to take its own decisions; and the agency has integrated the emerging migration control apparatus and the 'asylum migration nexus', compromising its core protection mandate (Betts et al. 2012: 68). The issue of migration is depoliticised not only through 'the technocratic reliance on expertise and empirical evidence to avoid political controversies' but also through 'a naturalisation of the global socio-economic and political context in which migration takes place, that is taken for granted and therefore unchallenged' (Pécoud 2015: 95). Whereas depoliticisation takes place when such assumptions are entrenched to the extent that they are no longer questioned or disputed, politicisation takes place when the underlying assumptions that guide society are disputed. Repoliticising migration and border policies thus means promoting the existence of antagonism, conflict, difference and choice as opposed to the passive acceptance of the whole framework.

To study repoliticisation dynamics, I focus mainly on the UNHCR, as the ICMPD has remained, mentioned in chapter three, extremely discreet in its activities. It is isolated from the humanitarian ecosystem: most interviewees from humanitarian organisations had not heard of its activities in Lebanon. It remains unknown from the general public as well, with an almost non-existent press coverage. I mentioned that the small ICMPD office, comprising a dozen employees, is located in the Adliyeh district, steps from the office of the GSO, and not far from the ISF, the MoSA and other key Lebanese administrations. The ICMPD thus benefits from a direct link to key security institutions in line with its image of 'backroom boy' (Geiger, 2007), its undercover role of informal advisor on border issues, and has remained hidden and 'sheltered' from public scrutiny. It has not been scrutinised to the same extent as the UNHCR, an agency engaged in tactics of public communication and diplomacy to display an 'apolitical'

---

depoliticisation of border management by supporting its institutional system, relieving states from their search and rescue responsibilities and providing a humanitarian legitimation for exclusionary policies and practices'.

image to the world. In addition, as shown in chapter three, the ICMPD's interventions were widely accepted by security institutions. During the research, I have not witnessed any instances of them being called into questions by my interlocutors.

This chapter examines processes of repoliticisation of the interventions of Western donors and the UNHCR, in particular by local actors such as the Lebanese authorities and civil society. I point to two criteria of discursive repoliticisation: first, an insistence on the contingency of choices and political interests; second, speech acts pushing for alternative policy options. I highlight repoliticisation repertoires, such as expressions of political positioning or criticism, an emphasis on Western interests, the promotion of alternative worldviews or a radical rethink of policies, calling for legal change, challenging categorisation practices or the sedentary bias, or more generally questioning the global socio-economic and political context in which refugee governance takes place.

I draw attention to the potential effects of these repoliticisation tactics. According to Weedon (1996: 107), in order to have a counter-hegemonic effect, a discourse needs to be in 'circulation'. I point at the circulation of discourses to determine how large an audience they reach and how effective their messages are in influencing it. Do groups of actors engaged in repoliticisation attempt to shape a collective 'dramaturgy' or at least to act collectively so as to make their repoliticisation more visible?

This chapter examines the question as to whether repoliticisation is purely a discursive process or whether these political sentiments are able to produce political practices, and with what results. It calls into question the 'weak state' paradigm used to describe the Lebanese state, by showing the agency and strategic thinking deployed by the government. Do repoliticisation tactics aim to pressure and influence international actors with a view to change policies? Do they manage to force alternative options on the agenda? This chapter unravels the underlying power dynamics accompanying repoliticisation. Indeed, the balance between depoliticisation and the political reactivation of the political origin of the social through repoliticisation is something that is politically decided: what is politicised and not politicised is, in the final instance, determined by political power strategies and political struggles (Sorensen & Torfing 2017).

This raises the question of resistance: can repoliticisation be seen as a form of resistance to this governance arrangement? Contrary to similar analytical categories such as conflict, collective mobilisation or social movement, resistance can account for realities whose conflictual dimension is not taken for granted because it is obscured, discreet, or invisibilised by the reference frameworks of the register of contestation. Resistance amounts to an active behaviour (be it verbal, cognitive or physical) operated in opposition to something, which can be exercised at the individual or collective level (Hollander & Einwohner 2004). Having as a target the source of social control, it aims to modify a power relationship. However, many aspects are debated in the literature, in particular whether it has to be intentional or effective (in the sense that it reaches a concrete goal).

This chapter highlights the tension between the attempts made by Lebanese authorities and NGOs to repoliticise refuge governance (by calling into question the attitudes and policies of European donor states and the UNHCR), and their acceptance of specific dimensions of this depoliticisation. Local authorities and organisations draw a distinction between aspects of depoliticised refugee governance that they accept, or even take advantage of, and those that they challenge. I thus track and highlight the 'hopping' between depoliticising and repoliticising moves (Sørenson & Torfing 2017).

The first section points to the repoliticisation of Western interests by local actors by unravelling the circulation of discourses emphasising political agency and challenging hegemonic narratives on refugee governance: criticism towards the EU agenda of border externalisation and the 'tactic of distancing' that puts the UNHCR on the frontlines, and insistence on the interests of the GoL (opposed to those of the international community). In the second section, I analyse the disruptive effects of repoliticisation practices, such as open conflicts and practices of resistance, as well as their effects in terms of power balance. Indeed, the Lebanese authorities have gained leverage over the donor community and the UNHCR, whose space of operation has been shrinking when it comes to return policies. The third section unravels the role of the Lebanese civil society, between depoliticisation and resistance practices, by showing that Lebanese NGOs are co-opted in transnational governmentality, despite attempts to resist international norms and narratives. In the end, rather than studying repoliticisation as an isolated phenomenon, this chapter highlights the constant 'coming and going' between depoliticisation and repoliticisation.

I. <u>Challenging hegemonic narratves: discursive repoliticisation of refugee governance</u>

This section sheds light on the circulation of discourses emphasising the political agency and interests of Western donors and the UNHCR. Chapter two and chapter three have shown that depoliticisation is a narrative empowering Western actors. In this chapter, I contend that repoliticisation represents a potential lever to challenge the power of Western donors and the UNHCR. Indeed, the narrative system surrounding the regime of refugee governance anchors its legitimacy in the proclaimed neutrality and universality of its norms. Thus, the diffusion of narratives of repoliticisation calling into question these norms has repercussions on the perceived legitimacy of this governance system and on its perpetuation. It questions (or even poses a challenge to) the global socio-economic and political context in which migration takes place. Repoliticisation manifests through an emphasis on Western donor interests, their 'tactic of distancing' relying on the UNHCR, and an emphasis on the political interests of the GoL.

A) Emphasising and stigmatising donors political interests

To empirically pinpoint repoliticisation, I have paid close attention to repoliticisation repertoires and tactics, such as expressions of political positioning or criticism, emphasis on Western interests, patterns of speech act emphasising political agency, choice, interests and responsibility. This section examines a 'repertoire' of discursive repoliticisation that insists on the contingency of European choices and political interests. National interests refer to a government's goals and aspirations, be it economic, political or military. In realist theory, interests and power are synonymous, as interests are both based *on,* as well as condition *of* power. Yet, from a constructivist point of view, interests are closely linked to ideas and not entirely objective – what matters is how a country perceives the other country's interests (Keohane & Nye 2001).

The first of these interpretative repertoires emphasise Western donor states' foreign policy objectives: in conversations, interviewees made it clear that they conceived the European response and its delegation to the UNHCR as an externalisation tactic to avoid taking in refugees, with frequent comparison with deals between the EU and Libya, Tunisia, Morocco or

Turkey. The function of this repertoire is to stigmatise Western states interests and thus to delegitimise their response. Actors on the ground assert that they are well aware of the political rationale of the EU. Therefore, they discursively reaffirm that interactive governance is about choice and power rather than humanitarian concerns. Representatives of the Lebanese government fleshed out the direct link between increased European funding from 2015 on and the refugee 'crisis' in Europe.[346] The following quotes from Lebanese state representatives capture well this logic of externalisation:

> 'Here, at the MEHE, we know that the UN, UNICEF and the EU massively supported programmes for the education of refugee children to facilitate their integration in Lebanon or facilitate their return to Syria, but the main objective is to avoid migratory flows towards Europe. We had more funding from 2015 onwards: it was clear that this funding was always connected to the Syrian 'refugee crisis' in Europe.' [347]

> 'The money increases when Syrian refugees come to Europe … At the beginning, we did not get much, and then in 2015, we started to get more, and now it is decreasing again.'[348]

> 'We need to talk about the hypocrisy of the international community who send money without hosting refugees and who pretends to be opposed to refugee returns. This purely defensive strategic approach won't work. It's hypocritical. It's a masquerade that will blow up in their face. NGOs are sent by governments just to give themselves a clear conscience […] Clashes will be much more frequent between the international community and the GoL. It is ridiculous to say: 'we don't want to talk to Bachar al Assad'. We don't wanna communicate with him, or about a solution implying him, so we don't do anything.'[349]

As reflected by these quotes, 'to politicise' something is to 'expose and contest what is taken for granted about it, or perceived to be necessary, permanent, invariable, essential and morally

[346] For instance, interview with a representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Affairs, Beirut, November 2018.
[347] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Beirut, September 2019.
[348] Interview with a representative of the municipality of Baalbeck, Baalbeck, January 2020.
[349] Interview with a Lebanese diplomat, Paris, March 2019.

or politically obligatory within particular social relations' (Jenkins 2011: 159-60). Other statements have emphasised the structural imbalance of power between the international community and the GoL (to the disadvantage of the latter):

'The real decision-makers are the French, European politicians, not the UN. At the beginning of the Syrian war, European governments imposed on Lebanon to keep the borders open and receive refugees. We wanted to close the borders, but it was impossible, so they remained open. They did not give much choice to the Lebanese government, it was like, 'here is what we decided for camps, for the borders, don't discuss it.''[350]

These statements destabilise the international community's depoliticised narrative: recurrent emphasis on the structural context and power relations goes against the 'euphemising' of dissensions informed by the apolitical discourse. Thus, if depoliticisation smooths out disagreements, repoliticisation reveals the political aspect of decisions and policymaking. Trough discursive politicisation, 'contingency, deliberation and choice are revealed in processes of decision-making' (Fawcett et al. 2017: 289).

The perception that Europe wants to keep refugees at bay was also widely shared among representatives of the Lebanese civil society and NGOs, as well as among the Lebanese public.[351] This 'circulation' (Weedon 1996: 107) epitomises the counter-hegemonic potential of these discourses, as captured by the following quotes from representatives of Lebanese NGOs:

'The donors just want refugees to stay in Lebanon. So, they pay the UNHCR, OCHA, to focus on the Syrians, because it is their mandate, and to keep them officially here so they don't go into their countries. It's obvious.'[352]

'They only thing the EU cares about is to stop the influx of refugees into Europe. That's why they promised Turkey, we will pay you some money just to keep them away from

---

[350] Interview with a representative of the Lebanese MFA, February 2020.
[351] 'There is a common perception among Lebanese political actors that it is in the international community's interest to maintain stability and good living conditions for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to avoid more refugees fleeing to Europe', *in* Atallah & Mahdi (2017: 16).
[352] Interview with a representative of the NGO Banin, Beirut, October 2021.

us. This is also why they send a lot of money to Lebanon. There is no real humanitarian perspective, there is no human response, no caring for the people. They don't care about people being killed or bombed: 'ok I'm going to give you some money just so you leave us alone.''[353]

'Lebanon nowadays is being supported a lot by the international community to keep the refugees. After the Syrian refugee influx to Europe, Europe wanted refugees to stay more in the first country of asylum. So, they started to support these countries: 'Keep the refugees, we will keep supporting you'. Because if anything happened, the world would pass it to Lebanon, 1,5 million besides four million Lebanese would end up in Europe […] This is why the international community was supporting a lot the Lebanese Army in this fight against ISIS terrorists. We see it in Maghreb, in Libya, in Turkey … Pay the Army, the authority, to stop the migration.'[354]

The 'political reactivation' also entails an emphasis on the contingent aspects of power with the respective interests of different Western institutions:

'Let's talk about aid as politics. Aid thinks it is separated from politics, but you cannot divorce one from the other: this is soft power. And each institution is directed by political players with interests. You go to the UN, it is different from the EU, it depends on who is the *Chargé d'Affaire,* who is pushing at the political level, what Brussels wants around this issue, what does the German embassy want. It depends on which government, who win the elections […] The aid industry is not here to help. It is here to fulfil the national interests of big players.'[355]

Finally, Western interests were connected to European national agendas, in particular elections:

'Europe now is happy to reach an agreement that keeps migrants in Syria […] European countries want to pretend, especially before the elections, that they have been

---

[353] Interview with a representative of Islamic Relief, Beirut, January 2020.
[354] Interview with a Lebanese employee of the UNHCR, Zahle, December 2018.
[355] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese think tank, Beirut, October 2021.

successfully able to reach an agreement that manages migration. Whatever you want, just keep the number down. So, you can read it politically.'[356]

'Look at how the EU deals with Syrians. We need to give aid. Because if we don't give aid, things will fall apart and then they will go to Cyprus, Europe, and then the far right comes to power and Le Pen becomes the President of France. You see the connection very easily.'[357]

Geopolitical motivations were also emphasised, as working with the Syrian regime to support returns would grant it legitimacy and increase Russia's leverage in the region: 'the international community plays the '*refugee card*' and oppose returns, but it is just a political move to oppose Bachar al Assad'.[358] Another occurrence of repoliticisation can be seen in UNHCR resettlement officers exposing discriminatory practices during resettlement processes (cf. chapter two).

In a few conversations, in particular informal ones, representatives of the EU, Member States and the UNHCR would distance themselves from their official function and insist on or even criticise European strategic interests.[359] For instance, a European fonctionnaire directly linked the evolution of the budget of the EU delegation in Beirut in 2015 to the 'refugee crisis' in European media, with the budget of the ECHO office in Beirut doubled the day after the dead body of Syrian boy Alan Kurdi was found on a Turkish beach and made headlines around the globe (see, page 178).

'EU civilians are afraid of this 'existential threat', so there is a need to show Europeans that refugees are fine here, that they won't come to Europe. But how to do this? That is where the UN comes into the game. The role of the UN and of the UNHCR is to act in the interest of donors […] The donors are overall pushing for their interests back home.'[360]

---

[356] Interview with a representative of the NGO ALEF, Beirut, December 2018.
[357] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese NGO, Beirut, October 2021.
[359] For instance, interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, 24 January 2020; and Paris, 11 February 2020; interview with a representative from the DG Near (European Commission), Brussels, 27 February 2020.
[360] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.

'The political pressure has been altering the need-based analysis. Our relations [at the EU Delegation] are not good with the government. But it's normal, they are fed up with us! It really does feel like international donors send money just to keep refugees at bay […] the Lebanese society has been much more tolerant to refugees than any European country. I agree with their position: they cannot host 1,5 million refugees, they came out of two wars, they have one war in Syria, they have Israel … They are blocked. You have to take away some of the pressure.'[361]

'We use the MADAD fund to make living conditions more sustainable in Lebanon to prevent Syrian arrivals to Europe. There is no consent about how to deal with the situation. There has been a huge lack of empathy. The one who put a lot of money are the ones who want the situation to remain the same […] ECHO became a crisis management tool informed by the priorities of the EU states, designed to manage an EU crisis, not the Lebanese crisis.'[362]

Interviewees representing international institutions also offered detailed accounts of the power tensions shaping their decision-making processes. For instance, testimonies from EU officials revealed the competition between the 'political' and 'humanitarian' branches of the EU (respectively EEAS/NEAR and ECHO) with attempts to 'prevent ECHO from gaining independence through this crisis'.[363] Another of such power dynamics concerned the negotiations for the allocation of the MADAD fund for the Syrian response. EU officials insisted on the fact that 'the MADAD is used to fulfil sovereign interests' as Member Countries' political weight during board meetings deciding on projects prepared by NEAR and ECHO is contingent on their financial participation in the European Neighbourhood Instrument. This way, countries with an important participation – such as Denmark, Germany or Sweden – can promote their bilateral interests and 'push for their own agenda' during international meeting groups ahead of EU councils (where decisions are made).[364]

Through the stigmatisation of European interests, repoliticisation recognises the multiplicity and hybridity of patterns of governance, as well as their contingency and instability, and makes

---

[361] Interview with a representative of the EU Delegation, Beirut, January 2020.
[362] Interview with a representative of the European Commission, September 2021.
[363] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.
[364] Interview with a representative of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) of the European Commission, Brussels, February 2020.

power dynamics and conflicts the object of a narrative. This way, repoliticisation attempts to destabilise the hegemonic thinking about governance that tends to depoliticise it (on the grounds of humanitarianism or neutral expertise). Thus, we see that the function of this repertoire is to delegitimise the response of Western states. Delegitimisation takes place through 'discursively creating and transmitting a negative image of the Other' (Screti 2013: 212): it amounts to discursive processes by which speakers licence a type of social behaviour enacted by 'argumentation, that is, by providing arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc.' (Reyes 2011). As legitimacy, delegitimisation 'rests in the eye of the beholder' (Hilhorst, Weijers & van Wessel 2012: 1443) as 'something which is socially constructed and given meaning by the normative framework within which it exists' (Lister 2003: 178).

B) Criticising the 'tactic of distancing'

The UNHCR has become the locus for much of the criticism, debates and scrutiny surrounding the refugee response. According to European officials, in bilateral meetings, Lebanese representatives would display their discontent towards the agency seen as an institution that 'only cares about the refugees' while neglecting the host community. Other humanitarian organisations such as the NGO Amel have been denigrated on the same grounds.[365]

The UNHCR is widely perceived as a tool to preserve Europe's interests. An officer from ECHO highlighted the 'strong relationship' between the EU and the UNHCR and the discreet 'complicity' of the UNHCR towards exclusionary and anti-refugee policies of donor states:

> 'The EU has been grateful to the UNHCR for the way it dealt with the refugee crisis in Europe. They did not point at the EU for its non-compliance with the 1951 Convention and numerous violations of refugee rights. If they needed to release a communication condemning let's say France, or any European country for its treatment of refugees, they would do it on a Saturday at 8 AM so it avoids the press attention... We call this 'whitewashing'. When your political interests dominate refugees' interests.'[366]

---

[365] For instance, interview with representatives of the French MFA, Beirut, January 2020.
[366] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.

'For instance, EU Member States mostly resettle Christian refugees. The UNHCR knows how the selection is made, they participate, they see the criteria put forth by the Member States, but they would never say anything. The problem with the UNHCR, is that it has no transparency and the Member States are not accountable.'[367]

In addition, the delegation of the response to the UNHCR is seen as a 'tactic of distancing' from the international political community to avoid bearing the responsibilities of the refugee response in Lebanon, putting the UNHCR in the position of 'scapegoat':

'There is a need to show the EU that refugees are fine here and that they won't come to Europe. But how to do this? That's where the UN comes into the game. The role of the UN and of the UNHCR is in the interest of governments and donors. The UNHCR is like the fig leaf for the international community.'[368]

'The UNSG [United Nations Security General] is not technical: it is the UN Political body, not the UN refugee body. The political body is just happy that they are not involved in the discussion. And they are pushing the UNHCR to do it, but this is not its job. The clear subject is return, it's nationality. Those are not technical problems; those are political problems. You are telling a technical person to do politics. So, putting UNHCR representatives on the frontlines, it's unfair to them. It needs to be Lazzarini[369] or a UN higher political body, not the UNHCR. You are telling a technical person to do politics.'[370]

'The 'fatigue' of the Lebanese government towards the UNHCR is 'in reality directed towards the international community. Not UNHCR. The donors are the real decision-makers: UNHCR does everything they want. It's just that this anger needs to concentrate on something.'[371]

---

[367] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese state agency, Beirut, October 2021.
[368] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese state agency, Beirut, October 2021.
[369] Lazzarini was then Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon.
[370] Interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, 26 December 2018.
[371] Interview with a representative of the Lebanese MFA, Paris, February 2020.

Thus, the tactic of distancing itself is at the centre of the criticism: depoliticisation strategies are highlighted as displaying political agency and stigmatised for revealing political interests.

According to recent literature, the politicisation of international institutions should be understood as a consequence of their new authority, growing competencies and more intensive utilisation by states, as the more political authority international institutions exercise or are expected to exercise, the more they attract public attention and demands (Zürn et al.: 2012). As mentioned in chapter two, the UNHCR has considerably expanded its mandate, from refugee protection to many aspects of humanitarian and development aid, an evolution tangible in Lebanon. Thus, besides the 'tactic of distancing', this can also be an explanatory factor for its degree of politicisation in Lebanon in the context of the Syrian 'crisis'. As a comparison, the ICMPD, the IOM or the ICRC in Lebanon, with their circumscribed mandate, have not been the target of such scrutiny. In 2018, the ICRC shared with the Presidency and the MFA an official position on return stating that the conditions are not satisfactory and that any return initiative should await a political solution, a position similar to that of the UNHCR. However, this did not trigger any backlash: 'our approach was different, more discreet. We don't have the same means as the UNHCR, we are smaller'.[372] Thus, 'the dialogue with the government has remained extremely positive throughout the years':

> 'We were never the subject of any official statement criticising our encroachment on Lebanon's sovereignty, like it happened for the UNHCR. We avoided that because we are not involved in resettlement, we are not involved in returns, our mandate is very specific, related to situations of international conflicts and detention, which has probably not exposed us so much as UN agencies. I think it's our very independent and neutral distance that is perceived as positive for the authorities, and the way the ICRC is working, in this confidential bilateral dialogue, with state and security agencies. While the UNHCR is much more exposed.'[373]

In 2018, when the UNHCR was under fire for its statement on return and accusations of having the hidden agenda to keep refugees in Lebanon, UNHCR officials reached out to their ICRC

---

[372] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.
[373] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Tripoli, December 2018.

colleagues to ask for their public support, but 'we are not influential enough, we could have issued an official statement, but it would have been useless'.[374]

This falls in line with Petiteville (2017a) and Zürn et al. (2012)'s theory that the more IOs are general in scope, the more likely they are to be exposed to politicisation processes. Conversely, the narrower and more technical their mandate (following Mitrany's (1966) vision of ideal 'functional' IOs) the more successful they are in depoliticising their activity (Petiteville, *ibid.*). This can partly explain why the ICMPD has not faced any scrutiny in Lebanon. The same can be said about the IOM, the WFP or the ICRC, their mandate being (in the Lebanese context) specific in scope.

C) Asserting Lebanon's opposing interests with the international community

Another key discursive component of this repoliticisation consists in asserting the political interests of Lebanon to the extent that they are opposed to those of the international community. As mentioned in previous chapters, since the beginning of Syrian arrivals, the Lebanese government's primary goal has been to ensure that the Syrians' stay would only be temporary, until their resettlement or return to Syria,[375] while progressively limiting their arrivals. They have attempted to avoid integration of Syrian refugees 'at all costs' (Fakhoury & Stel 2022: 5). In particular, the topic of return to Syria crystallised disagreements, with the Lebanese authorities pushing for refugee return while Western donors have opposed them based on the UNHCR's position that security and humanitarian conditions in Syria are not satisfactory. Lebanese authorities' willingness to use foreign resources to organise large-scale returns has appeared unlikely to succeed, creating further tensions.

Those interests were reiterated sharply in official public statements and interviews conducted within the Lebanese administration. Numerous statements from representatives of the MFA on the Syrian refugee crisis have contributed to shaping it as a foreign policy priority. The most assertive in this regard has been former Minister Gebran Bassil (in function from 2014 to 2020)

---

[374] Interview with a representative of the ICRC, Zahle, November 2018.
[375] See Chapter one.

seen as the most controversial politician in Lebanon and infamous for his anti-refugee diatribes.[376]

International events were the opportunity for state officials to publicly assert these interests. In January 2019, during an Arab economic summit hosted in Beirut, Gebran Bassil appealed to the international community to take steps to encourage Syrian refugees to return home ('we call on the international community to take its responsibility to curb the misery') while the President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, encouraged the 'safe return of displaced Syrians' which 'should not be linked to a political situation in Syria'. During a joint conference with the UNHCR at the Université Saint-Joseph in 2018 in the presence of UNHCR representative Mireille Matthieu, a diplomatic attaché advocated the elaboration of a global pact for refugee return:

> 'The voluntary repatriation is the fundamental solution, and it should not be conditioned to a political solution. With the cessation of war circumstances, return should happen with the support of the international community […] Integration is not an acceptable solution. This falls under the sovereign decision of states.'[377]

This position has remained consistent over the years: at the Brussels Conference on June 30, 2020, caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab said that 'return to Syria […] should not wait for the political settlement of the Syrian conflict'.[378] In September 2022, President Around made public its decision with Syria on the initial steps for the implementation of a plan to send Syrian refugees back to their home country, and as an indication of a shift in MoSA's position, Minister Hector Hajjar voiced its support for this plan.[379]This position is captured by this quote from a representative of the MFA:

376 Leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gebran Bassil is very close to the Syrian regime. Often accused of corruption, racism and nepotism, Gebran Bassil was labeled the 'most hated man in Lebanon'. He was sanctioned by the United States under the Magnitsky Act in 2020. See, for instance: Ali Harb, 'Lebanon's foreign minister slammed for anti-refugees comments', 26 September 2016, available at: https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/lebanon-s-fm-bassil-slammed-anti-refugee-comments-1463340225 [last accessed: 15 April 2023]; and: Patrick Wintour, 'Thousands of Syrian refugees could be sent back, says Lebanese minister', 15 June 2019, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/15/thousands-of-syrian-refugees-could-be-sent-back-says-lebanese-minister [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
377 Intervention from a Lebanese diplomat during a roundtable organised by the Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut, October 2018.
378 Statement of the President of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon Hassan Diab, IVth Brussels Conference on 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region', held on June 30, 2020.
379 Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs Hector Hajjar said in a statement: 'We have agreed with President Aoun on many points related to the Syrian refugees' return plan, and we coordinated our positions hoping to hold more

'Pushing for the integration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon will prompt the disintegration of the country and a war. We absolutely need to change the discourse concerning returns, and it is not up to the international community to decide on return conditions, it is up to Lebanon to do so.'[380]

European diplomats have testified that during meetings with their Lebanese homologues, 'confrontations' on the topic of Syrian refugees play a 'performative role' with representatives of the MFA engaged in a form of collective dramaturgy:

'Every time, it is the same thing, they repeat the same discourse, 'you don't take any refugees, you force us to accept them, but we don't want them anymore, they need to return.' They systematically start meetings with this. Even if they know that we have heard this message many times.'[381]

'At every meeting with them we need to repeat that no, we don't have the hidden agenda to make refugees stay here.'[382]

*

This section has shed light on tactics of discursive repoliticisation: through the stigmatisation of Western interests, local actors put into question the legitimacy of the global socio-economic and political context underlying refugee governance and the power relations and structural inequalities underpinning it. The functions of these repertoires are to resist legitimacy gains facilitated by depoliticisation, to challenge existing power dynamics and to open up space for debate. Through a 'problematisation and contestation of social meaning and identity' behind depoliticised policies and discourses, they have reactivated the political origin of these 'relatively sedimented layers of social institutions and practices' (Sorensen & Torfing 2017:

---

meetings next week to agree on the basic steps to be taken to start with the return process', see: https://english.news.cn/20220809/178104941729472d9fd85c9719417712/c.html

[380] Interview with a representative of the Lebanese MFA, Paris, February 2020.

[381] Interview with a representative of the French MFA, Paris, February 2020.

[382] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, January 2020.

45). I posit that even though a discrete, symbolic practice, discursive repoliticisation represents a form of resistance as the 'success' of the refugee regime partly stems from its ability to self-justify itself and to maintain relations necessary to its perpetuation while reproducing its own system. Thus, any counter-narrative outlining the failures of this system can represent a form of challenge. Asserting this amounts to adopting a poststructuralist perspective which contends that language is the place where existing and possible forms of social organisations are defined and contested (Weedon 1996). Thus, discourse does not only reinforce power: it can undermine it as well and expose it, rendering it fragile and possible to oppose (Foucault 1972).

If repoliticisation sheds light on the existence of antagonism and choice, it also 'expands the space for political conflict and deliberation' (Sorensen & Torfing 2017: 32). Does this repoliticisation remain purely discursive or is it 'turned into action' (Mérand 2022)? This question is crucial to appraising the potential disruptive effects of repoliticisation on this governance system. This is the subject of the next two sections: I assess the practical and disruptive effects of repoliticisation regarding the Lebanese authorities on the one hand, and the civil society and NGOs on the other. What are the effects of repoliticisation in terms of power balance and leverage between these actors?

II.   <u>An evolving power dynamic benefitting the Lebanese authorities</u>

This section examines the effects of repoliticisation on power relations between the Lebanese government and the international community: it assesses whether repoliticisation leads to an expansion of the space for political conflict, or whether it remains purely discursive. I build upon Barnett and Duvall's multifaceted definition of power (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 42) as 'the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate'. Dahl's notion of 'relational power' defines power as the capacity to carry out one's will in a contextual interaction (Dahl 1957: 201-215). According to realist conceptions, power is 'the ability of states to use material resources to get others to do what they otherwise would not do' (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 40). This focus on hard power and

economic resources is shared by neo-Marxists, who argue that state power is determined by modes of production and the extent to which a country is subject to economic exploitation or domination. Neoliberal institutionalism provides a more nuanced approach, whereby power is based on state interdependence, shared among actors and therefore, less locally concentrated (Keohane & Nye 2001). It also emphasises the ideational aspect of power, also highlighted by Barnett and Duvall's notion of 'productive power' (Barnett & Duvall 2005) as power acquired through systems of knowledge, social processes, and discursive practices. In this constructivist view, the main factors shaping states' behaviours are shared perceptions. This view allows for a de-centred understanding of power as heterogeneous, situated, contingent and subject to uncertainty: policy is 'always subject to contestation and reformulation by a range of pressures and forces it cannot contain' and 'resistance potential is always present' (Murray Li 2007: 386). Therefore, this study analyses 'symbolic power' as a bargaining chip that potentially challenges structural inequalities.

Another useful paradigm for this section is North-South power dynamics, whereby Lebanon is considered a 'developing' country and the international community is mostly represented by 'developed' countries. Traditional and Marxist views coincide in perceiving the North as enjoying more negotiating power to control the South due to its structural superiority (Barnett & Duvall 2005). This perspective is also emphasised by Gramscian hegemony, whereby actors are not fully aware that decisions are determined by structures (Lukes 1974). Therefore, North-South cooperation on migration governance would result in migrant sending countries (usually described as 'weak') being forced to act against their interest by migrant receiving countries (usually referred to as 'strong'). A more nuanced approach of asymmetrical interdependence has highlighted the negotiating power that migration governance offers to the South. In particular, Cassarino (2005: 227-231) has shown that sending countries are able to capitalise on their participation in collaborative efforts on migration to exert more leverage on the EU, a claim supported by Godenau et al. (2008: 45-62) and Paoletti (2011) with regards to the cooperation between Italy and North African countries. Thus, if within a North-South paradigm, Lebanon, as the recipient of international aid, is in a structurally 'weak' position, it has been capable of capitalising on its status of refugee-hosting country to exert more leverage on the EU to extract financial aid. In the same vein, Tsourapas (2019) has shown that in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, authorities have pursued 'refugee rent-seeking behaviour' as a way of requesting additional aid from the donor community.

Drawing on these conceptual frameworks, this section shows that repoliticisation tactics have had disruptive effects on refugee governance, as they have deprived international donors of some of their leverage while giving local actors the authority to redefine governance arrangements. Throughout, I assess whether the presence of refugees conferred bargaining power to any negotiating party and to what extent this was used to influence other actors. By scrutinising the discourses and practices involved in creating policies, I analyse the interactions and power dynamics between them. In doing so, I aim to show that refugee governance in Lebanon is the result of a social and confrontational process of negotiation. First, I unravel Lebanon's bargaining chips to regain power over the Lebanese authorities, i.e. state sovereignty, the securitisation of Syrian refugees by European actors and the lack of 'burden-sharing'. I then show that refugee governance is a conflictual process in Lebanon by pointing to practices of resistance from the authorities. Repoliticisation has thus concrete effects, in terms of the Lebanese authorities' increased leverage, allowing them to get more funding for their own gain and leading to a shrinking space of operation for the UNHCR.

Overall, the research illustrates the dialectic and fluidity between depoliticisation and repoliticisation processes: if the Lebanese authorities repoliticise certain aspects of the action of Western donors and the UNHCR, they also accept or even take advantage of their depoliticisation. In addition, it adds to the literature calling into question the relevance of the 'weak state' paradigm to analyse the Lebanese state (Hermez 2015; Ghamroun 2014; Mouawad & Baumann 2017: 70). Contrary to the prevalent idea that the GoL has displayed passivity and disengagement in the Syrian response, these studies highlight its strategic thinking and agency. In particular, Geha & Talhouk (2018) have shown that Lebanon has moved from a mere recipient of aid from the UN to a more active player in shaping crisis response policies, thereby displaying capacity to step up and influence UN agencies. Knudsen (2018), Salloukh et al. (2016) and Hazbun (2016) have also defied the notion of a weak state facing collapse with the refugee crisis, emphasising its resilience to spill-over effects. Stel (2020) posits that in putting their incapacities and ignorance on show, Lebanese authorities reveal their strategic thinking, while Fakhoury (2017: 682) argues that the Lebanese state has capitalised on its 'ingrained political repertoire' in its strategy of outsourcing the Syrian response. This chapter adds to this literature by emphasising the role of repoliticisation in revealing and giving power and agency to the Lebanese government.

A) Lebanon's bargaining chips

1. State sovereignty

The first factor allowing the Lebanese authorities to increase their bargaining power appeals to state sovereignty. As mentioned in chapter two, the UNHCR asserts its non-interference in state affairs, and its mandate being to support host government, it cannot openly oppose them,[383] so the GoL can ultimately refuse projects. Interviewees from the international community insisted that Lebanon finds itself in a unique position in terms of balance of power, as a middle-income country (at least until 2020) heavily dependent on foreign aid: 'it is a middle-income country with the needs of a developing country, so they assume a stronger position than proper developing countries'.[384]

Humanitarian actors have in theory a wider margin for manoeuvres to implement projects than development actors: as humanitarian projects are supposed to be short-term and need-based they do not require pre-established agreements from the authorities. This gives agencies such as ECHO or OCHA more leeway than development actors such as NEAR of UNDP. This quote from a representative of ECHO reflects this idea:

> 'With ECHO, it's not like with NEAR or EEAS: the allocation of funds comes from a humanitarian imperative so there is not this need to agree on everything. I don't have to follow a political line. We set the line. Because it is need-based and coming from different assessment of the fields.'[385]

> 'Humanitarian aid is not supposed to be agreed upon. It comes from an assessment of the situation. The Lebanese government cannot theoretically intervene when it comes to humanitarian money. But this is not the case for development projects, they can say that we are encroaching upon their sovereignty. When I was working for NEAR on development projects, it was different. It was a bilateral relation. Everything had to be agreed with the Lebanese authorities.'[386]

---

[383] UNHCR (2015: 1).
[384] Interview with a representative of the DG NEAR, European Commission, Brussels, February 2020.
[385] Interview with a representative of ECHO, Brussels, February 2020.
[386] Interview with a representative of ECHO, Beirut, October 2021.

However, as the Syrian crisis extended in time, and in particular after 2016, the line between humanitarian and development projects became inevitably blurry. At the same time, the GoL's attempts to regain control on the Syrian response, drawing on the rhetoric of state sovereignty, became more assertive.[387] Thus, many humanitarian workers have expressed their frustration at seeing some of their projects cancelled by the government.

2. The securitisation of Syrian refugees

Another bargaining chip relies on Europe's securitised position towards migration: if migration governance was not considered a major concern for the EU, Lebanon would be deprived of a critical lever. We saw that the perception that Europe wants to keep refugees at bay is shared among the Lebanese public and Lebanese representatives, as mentioned in chapter three.[388] The notion of 'productive power' (Barnett & Duvall 2005) is key here: the Lebanese government uses productive power for its own gain, drawing on fears generated by *the idea* of Syrian arrivals in the European imaginary – not actual arrivals – to assume a stronger position during negotiations.

As such, local actors consider that adjusting to their interlocutors' language would give them more leverage. Indeed, according to interviewees, UNIFIL partially stepping down from the surveillance of the maritime border and the Lebanese Army progressive taking over has created an opportunity for Lebanon to leverage certain powers to raise alarm about migration flows and pressure Europe to obtain concessions, as captured by these quotes:

> 'In the past, if you had surprising boat movements, you had UNIFIL to give us warnings about how it's going up, how it's going down. Sometimes you can encourage movements [of boats] that weren't there just to take more from Europe. When the Lebanese are doing that, that means deals between smugglers and Lebanese maritime forces can increase, in a way for Lebanon to have more leverage with the EU. To make yourself relevant on the map of Europe, create a crisis for them. Start sending more

---

[387] This can also be explained by contextual elements, with the end of a political deadlock marked by two years of presidential vacuum (ending with the election of Michel Aoun) and the formation of a cabinet of unity, and the end of the security crisis in Aarsal.

[388] 'There is a common perception among Lebanese political actors that it is in the international community's interest to maintain stability and good living conditions for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to avoid more refugees fleeing to Europe' (Atallah & Mahdi 2017: 16).

boats ... Ultimately, this would put the Lebanese authorities on the map of FRONTEX. So, Lebanon [could] become something relevant so we can make a deal like with Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey.'[389]

'We can always create new parameters to change the way Europe supports us and this is by being on their map, and to be on their map, send a couple of boats. Send one boat today and see the reaction of European countries. Just one boat, even an empty one like the boat that was caught in Tripoli port. It was enough to make sort of an outrage with embassies, they asked for a meeting with the intelligence division of the Army… So Lebanon knows that they have an upper hand. Before, the Europeans knew irregular migration was non-existent because they had their own radars. But when they will be no longer here, Lebanon can do whatever they want.'[390]

'In the idea of the Europeans, let's reinforce capacities of Lebanese services to help them detect better boat departures. But Lebanon can also close an eye and say, 'listen, we let them go.'[391]

These quotes capture the assumption that Lebanese representatives could adjust their language to that of their interlocutors – the language of externalisation – and make Lebanon the focus of international attention. They epitomise how a discursive image produced by the EU becomes a power asset for Lebanon. This way, the repertoire of externalisation and securitisation (Balzacq 2005) of refugees is subject to clear appropriation by the Lebanese authorities: these use their 'productive power' by invoking the image of an invasion of migrants to Europe. As mentioned in the third chapter, the GoL has adopted securitised narratives about Syrian refugees. An official from ECHO based in Beirut compared the way in which local and international actors adopted the same vision: 'from one day to the other, Syrians were depicted as an 'existential threat' for civilians. This is the same terminology that the EU has been using'.[392] This epitomises the relevance of 'productive power' in shaping Lebanon's interests: by conferring the social identity of 'existential threat' to the 'other', the Lebanese authorities, in the same capacity as the EU bestow upon themselves the right to conceive and adopt whatever measures so as to avoid this 'threat'. This shows the relevance of a constructive approach to interest, as

[389] Interview with a representative of Tripoli municipal council, January 2020.
[390] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese human-rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[391] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.
[392] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, 18 September 2018.

closely linked to ideas and not entirely objective – what matters is how a country perceives the other country's interests. It also reveals the interactive dimension of power: crucial to appraising power dynamics are each actors' reciprocal expectations. The interaction between donors and local actors was progressively shaped by how the latter conceive the interest of the former. It is just as important that Lebanese actors assume that the EU and other donors gain strong presence in Lebanon because of perceived 'security threats' linked to immigration. In that sense, anticipating such a (shared) perception of fear can shape power dynamics.

3. The lack of 'burden-sharing'

The last bargaining chip directly stems from repoliticisation tactics: interviewees testified that Europe's choice to close its borders to refugees, and the awareness of the structural inequality underpinning the lack of 'burden-sharing' by European and Lebanese actors alike, has made international donors lose some of their bargaining power to oppose Lebanese policies. This is an empirical evidence of the concrete effect of repoliticisation: by emphasising donor interest to keep refugee at bay, Lebanese authorities have gained leverage. For instance, according to a representative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), even though chanceries regularly advocate the loosening of restrictions on Syrian labour, entry and residency, 'as European countries do not take in any refugees, there is no 'advocacy' opportunities, [which] is key in the exchange. We cannot reproach them anything and diplomats know that'.[393] Likewise, though a European diplomat said that 'the international community should confront Lebanon more sharply' and 'perhaps threaten to cut their funding', the diplomat agreed that their persuasion power was undermined by the fact that European countries have not taken in refugees, preventing them from leading proper negotiations with the Lebanese government: 'our persuasion force is undermined by the fact that Europe does not take in any refugees. We cannot negotiate on an equal footing with the state hosting more than 1,5 million refugees'.[394]

---

[393] Interview with a representative of the DG NEAR, European Commission, Brussels, February 2020.
[394] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, January 2020.

B) Refugee governance as a confrontational process: opposition and resistance practices

This section shows evidence of repoliticisation turned into action. It emphasises that refugee governance is a conflictual process, with frequent confrontations between the GoL and international institutions. The protracted nature of the Syrian conflict has weakened the bargaining position of international actors, as attempts to resolve the conflict have failed, while Lebanese actors have attempted to gain more control on the response. According to interviewees, after 2016, it became 'increasingly difficult to deal with [the Lebanese authorities]' with testimonies that many hurdles were in the way of implementing projects: 'now, dealing with the government is difficult. It is extremely slow. Everything needs to be negotiated in the smallest details. It's hard to get anything done'.[395]

> 'At the beginning, in 2012-2013, they were leaving us do everything because they had this approach of denying the presence of refugees, acting as if they did not exist. So, a lot of foreign funds were targeting the Syrians. Then, they started seeing an opportunity. The shift happened between 2014 and 2017. It became in their interest to follow everything, to be informed, to require pre-approval for everything.'[396]

Dealing with the MFA proved particularly challenging (while cooperation with the MoSA was easier):

> 'It is a lot more difficult with the MFA than with the MoSA, because the MoSA, they are not with the Syrian regime. Each person in our government is doing what they are doing based on their Ministry decision's, not based on a common decision by the government.'[397]

> 'It is very difficult to deal with the Foreign Affairs representatives, more than at the beginning of the crisis. They are publicly against refugees. They completely refuse to cooperate. The dialogue is unproductive, sterile. At some point, during meetings with

---

[395] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR, online, April 2021.
[396] Interview with a representative of ECHO, Brussels, February 2020.
[397] Interview with a Lebanese representative of the UNHCR, Zahle, December 2018.

them, we would just decide to stop talking about [the topic of refugees] because we cannot handle the conversation any longer.'[398]

'[Gebran Bassil] is illogical. He accused the Europeans not to support him enough, and when we show him that we support him, he threatens to send the refugees back to Syria. With him, it reaches a personal level. He acts the same with all of us. They say that all is for his political ambitions.'[399]

One concrete resistance strategy from the authorities was to oppose the implementation of specific projects, in particular those perceived as targeting exclusively Syrian refugees (thus not deemed profitable enough for the host community). This provides the prime example of repoliticisation turned into action. This way, the authorities were both expressing their rejection of the presence of refugees as well as their desire to see more foreign funding dedicated to the Lebanese population. One example took place in Aarsal, in the Beqaa, a town populated with 99% of Syrians that suffers from a deficient sewerage system responsible for the spread of chronic diseases among the population especially children. Around 2018-19, UN agencies and INGOs have planned a number of infrastructural interventions, postponed many times by the authorities:

'The UNDP and UNICEF brought all the funds, 22 million dollars, for all the sewerage system inside the village but unfortunately until now they haven't been able to implement the project. I discussed with the government in 2017, told them that [Muslim Aid] could bring the money for the sewerage system, not for a long-term solution but a mid-term one: a small station to treat the black water they drink, no, the government refused. It is not easy to get permission for anything here in Arsaal.'[400]

Many testimonies from humanitarian workers corroborated this climate of increasing control:

'Since 2015, 2016, we have suffered from major controls from the government. If you want to do anything, you need to go to them. The government isn't allowing WASH

[398] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, January 2020.
[399] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, November 2019.
[400] Interview with a representative of Muslim Aid, Aarsal, November 2019.

anymore. The government isn't allowing vocational training for refugees … Now, the government isn't allowing you to do anything that has to do with job creation. Why?'[401]

'The Minister of Social Affairs obliged all the donors to let the money go through the Ministry so that Lebanon could be part of the decision. So I am a donor, I am bringing money to the country and then money will go to the corruption. They will concentrate on the centres they want to concentrate on. Donors are obeying those rules. They don't have the choice. They will say, 'khalas, we don't have the choice.' Whenever politics get through any work different than politics, in the humanitarian sector as in any other sectors, it will screw things up.'[402]

'The authorities always try to assert control, even over the humanitarians, while they should not intervene in humanitarian aid delivery. Thus, we have to bargain. I asked one person for example, from the MoI, she told me one thing about the water. I think they wanted to fix it in a space mainly occupied by Syrians. This is humanitarian. But the government refused.'[403]

Even the cooperation with the MEHE, though praised as a success, has been fraught with hurdles. Between the GoL and the UNHCR, relations have been strained since the early 2000s, with the agency 'becom[ing] increasingly exposed to governmental interferences in its operations' (Jagarnathsingh 2019: 411).[404] At the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the topics of registration[405] and resettlement have prompted tensions, as illustrated by these quotes from Lebanese state representatives:

'I have never liked UNHCR. When the Syrian crisis started, I had meetings and I told them, 'Lebanon cannot support this influx'. So let's do one thing, let's say these Syrians are 'displaced' until the situation will allow that we send them back to Syria. Don't give them the refugee status, because we will get caught up in a mechanism that will never

---

[401] Interview with a representative of the NGO ALEF, Beirut, December 2018.
[402] Interview with a representative of the charity Teqah, Tripoli, December 2019.
[403] Interview with a representative of the Qatari Red Crescent, Aarsal, November 2019.
[404] See, Chapter two.
[405] As mentioned in chapter two, the UN has shown compliance with the GoL's request to stop the registration of refugees.

end. But the UN representative told me, 'you know I handled a file with one million refugees, I know what I am doing.''[406]

'UNHCR dangled in front of migrants promises of resettlement, everyone applied, but in the end the countries did not deliver their promises and you have many Syrians still waiting for resettlement. It is nonsense. There is a business in this for UNHCR. We really struggle with them."[407]

Clashes with Gebran Bassil escalated in May 2018 when he threatened to stop issuing visas to UNHCR staff.[408] In doing so, Bassil buttressed the political stakes behind the UNHCR's action. Interviewees testified that this prompted a highly tense dialogue during the next few months, with the UNHCR deploying advocacy efforts to persuade Gebran Bassil to backtrack. This provides a prime example of how states can boycott an IO which does not serve their interests by accusing it of having become politicised in the first place, while they actually follow their own political agenda.[409] Thus, the depoliticised moves of the Western donor community, by drawing an apolitical space, have themselves paved the way for their own contestation: this is precisely because international actors have refused to publicly interfere in home affairs that local actors have got enough leverage to contest their authority. The repoliticisation of their response by local actors shows how such a tactic can nuance a structural balance of power.

European states and the UNHCR have attempted to capitalise on the political polarisation dividing the Lebanese authorities on the refugee response (indicative of differing attitudes towards the Syrian regime) to regain power.[410] In particular, they have tried to leverage the support provided by the MoSA against the MFA. For instance, when in 2019 the MFA asked the UNHCR to provide them with a list of their Syrian beneficiaries, the UNHCR refused, arguing that it was the MoSA's role to do so – while successfully pushing the MoSA not to relent to this request.[411] However, interviewees from European institutions and the UNHCR

---

[406] Interview with a retired General from GSO, Beirut, November 2018.

[407] The same issue had arisen with Iraqi refugees who arrived after 2003.

[408] This move was not approved by the entire political class: 'he was criticised by other Lebanese politicians who were like 'oh wait, you don't decide on behalf of other Lebanese, you only speak on your behalf.' Because he is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It's like Trump, going publicly on Twitter about Mexicans, and then the administration has to apologise for him.' Source: interview with a Lebanese aid worker, Zahle, December 2018.

[409] Jeanine Jalkh, 'Bassil part en guerre contre le HCR', Website, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 09 June 2018, available at https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1119987/bassil-part-en-guerre-contre-le-hcr.html [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

[410] See, Chapter one.

[411] Interview with a representative of the MoSA, Beirut, October 2021; Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, January 2020.

deplored the fact that the MoSA did not take a strong public stance in favour of hosting refugees, even though its influence is limited compared to the MFA.

C) The GoL's increased leverage and agenda-setting power

Neoliberal institutionalism has highlighted the role of 'agenda-setting' as a tool for securing power (Light 1982). In the case of Lebanon, donor conferences[412] have offered opportunities for 'agenda-setting' as a tool for obtaining more financial support from the international community. In this context, the government's ability to implement its agenda within different sectors further demonstrates its leverage over the international community. Thus, the governance evolved as a way to preserve Lebanon's interests, in line with recent studies on migration diplomacy that have highlighted the negotiating power that participation in migration governance offers to the South (Cassarino 2005; Paoletti, 2011).

1. *A 'refugee rentier state'*

Tsourapas (2019) has categorised Lebanon – along with Turkey and Jordan – as a 'refugee rentier states', i.e. 'employing their position as host states of forcibly displaced populations to extract revenue, or 'refugee rent', from other state or non-state actors in order to maintain these populations within their borders' (465). Indeed, the Lebanese authorities have been able to capitalise on the Syrian 'crisis' to negotiate more financial aid from the international community. The cooperation between the state and the international donor community revolves around broad issues such as economic growth, security and development. Among these, refugee arrivals have been prioritised in recent years. Here, the concept of 'issue-linkage' (Haas 1980) is applicable, as the act of linking separate items that appear on the agenda of the negotiators: by establishing connections between refugee arrivals and other issues corresponding to its interests, the government has increased its bargaining power. Of total donations pledged during the 2019 Brussels II conference on 'supporting the future of Syria in its region', 19% have been

---

[412] In particular, the London conference on 'supporting Syria and the region' held in February 2016 and the Brussels conferences held every year from March 2017 to March 2022.

dedicated to Lebanon – of which 31% in concessional loans (296 million USD).[413] As of August 2020, of total of donations pledged during the 2020 Brussels IV conference on 'supporting the future of Syria in its region' (European Union, 2020: 3), Lebanon had received the second largest amount of grant contributions, US$944 million. Between 2011 and 2022, Lebanon has received US$10.2 billion in support under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP).[414] The GoL has asserted its leverage by obtaining aid dedicated to economic investment plans, to support the host population with livelihood programmes, and in sectors that had been performing weakly even before Syrian arrivals such as water, electricity and waste management.[415]

'In the first LCRP plan, the host community was not included, and this was a very sensitive issue. But the following years, more and more funds have been and will be targeted towards the host community, for job creation, infrastructure, aid, shelters, social programs… We have been pushing for this a lot and to keep our decision-making power.'[416]

'The MOSA has managed to increase support for the host community through our advocacy, especially during the Brussels conferences. And the reaction was quick from the donors – from the EU especially – to support the National Poverty Targeting Program. Now that it is a protracted crisis, even the international community sees that helping the host community is important. The logic shifted: now it is to strengthen basic services and infrastructures, and make sure that refugees get 50%, Lebanese 50%.'[417]

2. *The government's ability to implement its agenda within key sectors: employment and education*

In addition, the GoL's ability to implement its agenda within the sectors of employment and education – two sectors in which international funding has been relatively important – further

---

[413] EU, 'Supporting Syria and the Region : Post-Brussels conference financial tracking, 'Brusssels, *Relief Web,* March 2019: 4-6, available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ syria-report-seven_0.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

[414] LCRP, 2017–22, 2022 update.

[415] European Union, 'Supporting Syria and the Region: Post-Brussels conference financial tracking', Website, *Relief Web:* 4 and 6, available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/syria-report-seven_0.pdf.

[416] Interview with a representative of the MoSA, Beirut, December 2018.

[417] Interview with a representative of the MoSA, Beirut, October 2021.

demonstrates its leverage over the international community. As potential drivers of refugee integration, these sectors are contentious and touch upon crucial power dynamics.

When it comes to education, the GoL has capitalised on converging interests with the international community.[418] Education has been a key component of the response in Lebanon, with proactive policies designed to provide refugee children with access to public education. Initially, the NGOs took over the responsibility of providing educational opportunities, however, the MEHE later decided to lead the educational response (Buckner, Spencer & Chae 2017). The 2014 launch of Reaching All Children with Education (RACE)[419] emphasised the importance of providing education to refugee children, in line with foreign donors' efforts to include Syrian children in Lebanon's public-school system (with a system of second-shift schools). A representative of the MEHE said that they 'wanted to make sure that the situation would not lead to extremism, or to a whole new generation of Syrians who do not have the capacity to rebuild their country'.[420] To pursue its agenda, the international community continued to bargain using two mechanisms. The first one is the use of financial incentives. The second mechanism is the use of a 'child-rights lens' rather than a 'refugee-rights lens' (*ibid*.: 453) by advocating for Lebanon's legal obligations as a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, transnational actors including NGOs attempted to pressure the Lebanese state to comply with Lebanon's international legal obligations to children. However, if in public the educational efforts were praised as a success, the road remained paved with hurdles. Lebanese officials kept insisting that the system was too beneficial for Syrian kids, and in 2019 the Minister of Education called for the suppression of the non-formal education (NFE) system and threatened to put on a 'blacklist' the organisations working for the NFE.[421]

'In a meeting, he said 'if you continue to support the Syrians in NFE, I will put you on the blacklist.' He threatened them. You always have two stories: the formal story and the unofficial one. The real reason behind this, is that at the time, the government was trying to take more money from the EU because they already had spent all the budget.

[418] The Ministry of public health has followed a similar dynamic, see Geha & Talhouk (2018).
[419] RACE is a comprehensive plan to provide over 400,000 school-aged Syrian children with learning opportunities in afternoon shifts within Lebanese schools. It has received widespread support from the international community.
[420] Interview with a representative of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Beirut, September 2019.
[421] The NFE Programme is exclusively designed for Syrian out-of-school refugee children (or in-school, but with specific education needs), aiming to provide them with access to education.

So the Ministry wanted the IOs to stop the NFE and refocus on formal education, to benefit Lebanese kids.'[422]

In the end, the second-shift school system suffered from significant lack of capacity and reports emphasised that discrimination problems towards Syrian kids were rife.[423] However, interviewees working in this sector testified that the UNHCR kept trusting the government to lead the educational response.

In this shrinking space for advocacy, the Lebanese authorities have concentrated their efforts on the legal framework surrounding the situation of refugees, in particular regarding employment. As mentioned earlier, Syrians have been working in Lebanon long before the eruption of the Syrian conflict (Jagarnathsingh 2016: 12).[424] Although the Lebanese government had adopted the principle of 'preference for nationals' it announces, generally by yearly decrees, exceptions of fields in which Syrians are allowed to work. Currently, Syrian migrant workers who are not recorded with UNHCR, are constrained to work in the sectors of agriculture, construction and 'environment'. Syrians wishing to work were required to have a 'pledge of responsibility' by a Lebanese sponsor from January 2015, and to obtain a legal status as migrant – denying them UNHCR aid. Lebanon Support's report (*ibid.*) indicates that these policies, meant to formalise Syrians' presence in the labour market, had the opposite effect. 'A lack of legal status'' 'restricted access to the labour market' and 'conflicting policies and practices' have 'pushed many Syrians into illegality and informal structures' and resulted in further abuse and exploitation (Jagarnathsingh 2016: 25).

Thus, the UNHCR and EU representatives have called for a lifting of the October policies and for Lebanon to open up its labour markets to support refugee livelihoods (as in Turkey and Jordan), in line with calls 'for a proper, organised market and job creation – in which Lebanon would benefit from tax money and Syrians would benefit from protection' (Jagarnathsingh 2016: 36). According to EU representatives:

---

[422] Interview with a representative of Muslim Aid, Zahle, October 2021.
[423] Cf HRW and UNHCR reports.
[424] The figures are based on the World Bank Data on the economic and social impact assessment of the Syrian conflict, and 'it is estimated that two years after [its] outbreak [...], the Syrian workforce in Lebanon increased between 30% and 50% [as compared to before the war], comprising about 14% of Lebanon's total workforce' (*ibid.*).

'In meetings, we constantly advocate to change the legal framework surrounding the situation of refugees, including the fact that they cannot work, and the October policies. Diplomats, chanceries, regularly get that message out. It comes automatically in conversations.'[425]

However, facilitating the work of refugees is a contentious issue as 'in the eyes of the authorities, it involves the risk to facilitate their settlement in Lebanon, it is not a neutral sector. It is perceived as a way to interfere with their sovereignty'.[426] The reluctance of the Lebanese government to formalise the employment of Syrians is justified by its unwillingness to ease Syrians' integration, and by low ability of the Lebanese economy to integrate new formalised work – as local unemployment already reaches 25%.[427] In 2016, the Lebanese government announced measures to enhance employment with the creation of 300,000 jobs through the Subsidised Temporary Employment Program (STEP) program, but these have not been implemented (Jagarnathsingh 2016).

On the other hand, the Lebanese authorities have managed to request funding to enhance employment for the host community. During the Brussels conferences, foreign donors committed to support job creation and donor pledges during the CEDRE conference nearly covered the entire first phase of its 'Capital Investment Program'. Further, through the European External Investment Plan, in February 2018, the EU announced a package of up to 164 million USD to support the Lebanese economy. Despite disbursing these funds, foreign donor advocacy to formalise refugee employment has proved ineffectual. The few measures aimed at enhancing Syrian work arrangements were in temporary and undesired jobs, precluding the possibility for integration. Thus the Lebanese government benefited from international aid in the labour sector despite diverging interests, as further evidence of its increased leverage.

The fact that the GoL has obtained aid that was not directly linked to the Syrian response has drawn criticism from representatives of EU donor states, as a contradiction of the principle of 'sovereignty'. Interviewees stigmatised what they perceived as a logic of 'profiteering' from a

---

[425] Interview with a representative of the DG NEAR, European Commission, Brussels, February 2020.
[426] Interview with a representative of EEAS, European Commission, Brussels, February 2020.
[427] Source: data from the Ministry of Labour in *Unemployment in Lebanon, findings and recommendations* (2021) by the Lebanese Republic Economic and Social Council.

government aware of the fact that it is responsible of the economic difficulties of Lebanon but would rather put the blame on the refugees. One interviewee insisted on what she perceives as the 'huge hypocrisy' of the Lebanese authorities whom 'add fuel the fire' even though they 'get a lot of money' out of the refugee crisis.[428]

> 'In the end, the presence of Syrians has had positive repercussions for the economy. And Lebanon is in a disastrous state, not because of the Syrians, but due to all the bad decisions that have been made by the government. And it is not up to the international community to take care of this. This is a question of economic sovereignty.'[429]

> 'Do you think that the Lebanese government want the Syrians to go back? No. They don't want the Syrians to go back. They want them to stay so donors keep sending money. Thousands of Lebanese are hired in IOs.'[430]

At the beginning of the economic crisis, foreign aid started to become more scrutinised: as one of the last remaining source of foreign currency in the country, reports insisted that it could easily become the target of resource-hogging by the political class. In a 2021 investigation, the Thomson Reuters Foundation estimated that at least 250 million USD in UN humanitarian aid intended for refugees and poor communities in Lebanon had been lost to banks – affiliated to political factions – selling the local currency at highly unfavourable rates.[431] Sources from the report informed that in total, between a third and half of the money sent by the UN to Lebanon have been 'swallowed' by banks since the beginning of the economic crash. This has prompted a debate on the urgency for the international humanitarian community to draw 'red lines' around the delivery of aid: a 2021 report from Synaps (a Beirut-based research center) warned against the risks of the aid industry becoming a 'target for a predatory elite seeking to vacuum up whatever foreign cash remains in the country'.[432]

---

[428] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, Octobre 2018.
[429] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, January 2020.
[430] Interview with a representative of AFD, October 2021.
[431] Source: Timour Azhari, 'Lebanese banks swallow at least $250m in U.N. aid', Reuters, 27 June 2021. Available at : https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-aid-trfn-idUSKCN2DT1CH [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
[432] Source: Synaps Report, '2022', June 21, 2021. Available at: https://www.synaps.network/post/lebanon-crisis-regime-dystopia [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

3. *The GoL's regained leverage over the UNHCR*

As previously mentioned, refugee returns to Syria see tensions and opposing discourses between the government and the international community. Without international support, Lebanese authorities have relied on domestic actors to facilitate returns. This required distancing themselves from a human-rights based approach as primary conditions of safety, voluntariness, and sustainability, are not yet fulfilled (Içduygu & Nimer 2020). In May 2019, eight NGOs expressed concern towards recent decisions adopted by the Supreme Defence Council that would lead to the deportation of Syrians (Legal Agenda 2019) and towards the decision by the General Director of GSO on 13 May 2019 to deport all Syrians who entered Lebanon irregularly after April 2019.[433] Nonetheless, 'returns, notably through forcibly signed 'voluntary' forms, are on the rise, although circumventing the principle of *non-refoulement*' (Jagarnathsingh 2019: 45).

Local authorities' increased leverage led to policy changes when it comes to refugee return: they displayed capacity to step up and influence UN agencies. Following Gebran Bassil's threats to stop issuing visas for UNHCR staff, the agency was wary of being accused of political interference. Thus, it opened an office along the border in the Beqaa, in charge of monitoring convoys back to Syria to provide refugees with medical and legal assistance,[434] while turning a blind eye on forced returns. A few governments such as France and Germany insisted that the UNHCR should be more careful regarding forced deportations and pushed for the agency to be able to do proper monitoring on the conditions of returnees including inside Syria.[435] However, the only concession granted by the GSO to the UNHCR was the permission to check the list of returnees 24 hours before their departure, so as to reach out to these individuals to assess their needs before their departure, but to this day information on those inside Syria are still inaccessible. The UNHCR's shifting position was also embedded in a climate of concessions towards the Syrian regime with 'a realignment of interests between the international community and the regime of Damascus. UNHCR would never have accepted that a few years ago. We went from a situation in which everyone would refuse to sit with Assad, to a situation in which

---

[433] General Director of the General Security Decision, No. 43830, 13 May 2019.
[434] Interview with a representative of the UNHCR Beqaa office, Zahle, 5 September 2018.
[435] Interview with a representative of ECHO Syria, Beirut, November 2018; interview with a representative of the IOM, Beirut, October 2018.

Damascus can use returns as leverage in order to be legitimised by the international community.'[436]

The Lebanese government (in particular the MFA) has made use of its 'compulsory power' (as 'relations of interaction of direct control', Barnett & Duvall 2005: 43) to pressure the UNHCR, demonstrating that its willingness to facilitate refugee return exceeded its interest in keeping good relations with the agency. Patterns of asymmetry in dialogue about returns between the UNHCR and the government have worsened, with the latter pressuring the former. Members of the international and humanitarian communities have criticised the UNHCR for keeping 'low profile', relenting to the authorities and thus failing to conduct its protection mission:[437]

> 'My opinion is that you should [be able to] do whatever you want! If you are persona non grata, it is [the government] that is going to be shamed. Can you imagine, a Foreign Affairs ministry making UN people persona non grata! Let them kick you out.'[438]

> 'If you want to keep doing concession, ok, but say that you are doing concessions. 'We stand at the border; we see people returning but we cannot do anything'. But you cannot appear in a documentary of France 24 with people with UN badges at the border, and when we ask if those returns are voluntary or not you tell us that we cannot know. Don't go to the border then […] You are giving legitimacy to the regime because whatever will happen people will eventually say, 'no, we had UN staff here'. What is somebody get there in Syria and get tortured. Lebanon is a signatory of the UN convention. So basically, it is a violation of non-refoulement. Don't reach the level of being suspected of an international crime against humanity.'[439]

Thus, these findings challenge traditional views of North-South power dynamics that consider participation of the South in migration control as entirely dictated by the North: analysing the multifaceted relationship dynamics between Lebanon and the international community reveals a complex interplay of gain and losses on both sides, where migration policies have become a form of bargaining power for Lebanon, at least to a certain extent.

---

[436] Interview with an ECHO officer, Beirut, September 2018.
[437] Interview with a European diplomat, Beirut, January 2020.
[438] Interview with the Director of a human-right NGO, Beirut, 26 December 2018.
[439] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese CSO, Beirut, October 2021.

*

This section has shown that repoliticisation tactics have expanded the space for political conflict and deliberation, showing an example of repoliticisation 'turned into action' (Mérand 2022) and giving way to resistance practices. Repoliticisation has shifted power dynamics between Lebanon and the international community in response to the arrivals of Syrian refugees, as Lebanese authorities – through extra control – have gained leverage which enabled them to extract extra funding, equipment, and aid from the international community. The Lebanese government has regained control over several aspects of the response, by capitalising on cooperation with foreign donors in order to redirect funds to serve their own economic interests and, at least in theory, those of the host community, particularly regarding employment and education. These shifts in funding patterns have been accepted by the international community as they pave the way for externalising EU migration control. The results of this research challenge Marxist ideas that structural inequality inevitably underpins North-South relations and consider the Lebanese government as 'structurally weak'. This finding validates the relevance of productive power (in comparison to structural power's binary relation of domination) as power is here a diffuse social process that concerns the capacity for action for the structurally advantaged and disadvantaged alike. This confirms neoliberal approaches to power as an interactive process based on state interdependence: Lebanon has capitalised on collaboration in handling Syrian refugees to exert more leverage on the EU and to extract financial aid. Thus, this section supports the claim that the paradigm of state weakness presents an inaccurate description of the workings of the Lebanese state: through repoliticisation, the government has displayed agency and strategic thinking. It has managed to renegotiate the modalities of a system of externalisation whose existence is not in itself called into question.

In addition, this chapter provides empirical grounding to the claim that depoliticisation and repoliticisation have a dialectical relation and are inherently diffuse movements that seem to coexist in shifting balances (Fawcett & Marsh: 2014; Flinders & Buller 2006: 297; Sorensen & Torfing 2017). The Lebanese authorities either repoliticise the action of Western donors, either accept or even play into their depoliticisation (when it is at their own advantage). For instance, they have espoused the 'apolitical' and technical dimension of the Western regime of refugee protection, seeing refugees as object of humanitarian care and not as subject of rights (allowing them to silence forced returns and human-rights violations inflected to refugees) and they support the UNHCR stance of non-intervention. At the same time, repoliticising the

international response is a tactic to ensure that it remains apolitical as regards its own internal policies.

III. The Lebanese civil society: between depoliticisation and resistance practices

The last section of this chapter turns to the effects of repoliticisation on the power relations between Western actors and Lebanese NGOs. In the first section, we saw that Lebanese NGOs participate in the discursive repoliticisation of the interests of Western donors and the UNHCR. Have they succeeded in turning this repoliticisation into power leverage? At first glance, the relations of Lebanese NGOs and Western actors are less confrontational (compared to those of the Lebanese government and the latter) as they have worked hand in hand to provide the humanitarian response to Syrian refugee arrivals. UN agencies have strongly relied on local NGOs for project implementation, while the latter have been dependent on Western donors for funding. This system of co-optation has rendered potential resistance to Western norms of refugee governance all the more challenging. Research has shown that NGOs often end up perpetuating existing power relations (for instance, see Choudry & Kapoor 2013; Cooley & Ron 2002): their resistance to international actors is limited by the structural inequalities featured by the humanitarian system and by the fact that Western donors and IOs resort to the same humanitarian principles put forward by NGOs, which limits their autonomy.

This chapter highlights the tension between the attempts made by some NGOs to repoliticise the Western norms of refugee governance by calling into question or opposing them, and the contribution provided by them to their depoliticisation. By focusing on NGOs, it complements existing literature on the relationship between transnational migration management and depoliticisation/repoliticisation, which deals mostly with IOs. First, I show that with the Syrian response, these organisations have been co-opted in a transnational system of governance that has strongly depoliticised their action. Second, I point to the fact that local NGOs have questioned the universality of Western norms and systems of knowledge, as well as the UNHCR's policy of neutrality and non-interference. In the end, the repoliticisation practices of

NGOs rarely venture beyond the discursive sphere: they remain essentially vocal, symbolic and deployed at an individual scale.

A) The depoliticisation of local NGOs through their co-optation in transnational governmentality

1. *NGOization and the political economy of aid in the context of the Syrian 'crisis'*

In Lebanon, since the nineteenth century the assistance needs generated by multiple crises (and first and foremost by a particularly destructive Civil War) have led a significant part of the society to structure itself around a real 'economy of poverty and assistance' (Picard 2016: 207) comprising of NGOs dedicated to assistance and emergency aid, economic and social development and then, from the mid-1990s, human rights defence (Troit & Abi Yaghi 2020: 162-3). This well-established national civil society has tended to replace a structurally missing state, or at least complete some of its services. It has been the first presence on the ground for every humanitarian emergency, capitalising on both its prolixity (with more than 5,000 NGOs, Lebanon has the world's highest number of NGOs per capita, *ibid*.: 169) and its proximity to the beneficiary population – in particular when it comes to smaller organisations and religious organisations, closer to the recipient communities (*ibid*.: 161). NGOs and CSOs[440] have a history of challenging political and economic systems: the Civil War saw for the first time the emergence of discourses and conceptions of civil society as a counter-power in Lebanon, a conception that extended to the October 2019 protests.

The Syrian conflict has led to the proliferation of CSOs and NGOs in Lebanon; it has 'unexpectedly revealed the extraordinary reservoirs of solidarity and mutual aid existing in Lebanese society 'outside' of the state – as though ordinary citizens (out of weariness or resignation) had become accustomed to functioning without it' (Geisser 2013: 67-84). The Lebanese Red Cross, national NGOs, neighbourhood associations, and spontaneous initiatives,

---

[440] NGOs are generally subsumed within the broader category of CSOs, which includes all non-market and non-state organisations in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain, without significant government-controlled participation or representation. NGOs are more specifically involved in development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

were the very first respondents when Syrian refugees fleeing the exactions of the regime arrived in 2011, before the deployment of UN operations, in particular in border areas. As numerous decisions were taken by municipalities and *mukhtar* (heads of district), Lebanese organisations were better suited to engage in a dialogue with them than UN agencies, for instance to negotiate the establishment of camps. Their role has been all the more crucial during the economic and financial crisis started in 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic, with lockdown restrictions limiting external interventions. A study from Lebanon Support showed that, during the January to March 2021 lockdown, forty-five percent of support initiatives to vulnerable populations came from local CSOs, thirty-three percent from national CSOs, seven percent from individual initiatives, and only ten percent from international organisations and non-governmental organisations (Lebanon Support 2021).

The trend towards NGOization witnessed in Lebanon since the 1950s has been amplified by the Syrian 'crisis'. By NGOization, I refer to a form of institutionalisation, professionalisation and depoliticisation of social action (Choudry & Kapoor 2013: 19). According to the critical scholarship on NGOs, there is synergy between the spread of neoliberalism in the late twentieth century and the rise of the third sector: indeed, NGOs are filling the vacuum left by a structurally missing state, thereby creating a situation where citizens are accustomed to functioning without it. This trend was accompanied by a shift in priorities for official development assistance since the 1980s, with governments, intergovernmental organisations and international financial institutions prioritising 'good governance', 'strengthening civil society' along with the 'bureaucratisation of social action' (Escobar 1995: 53). By giving the impression that NGOs are filling the vacuum left by a retreating state, NGOization normalises a situation where citizens are accustomed to functioning without a proper custodian of the public good; thus, it defuses political anger by framing as assistance or charity what people should have by right (Roy 2004).

This logic is in line with the clientelist repertoire of the Lebanese sectarian elite which favours sectarian reflexes over the development of a civic spirit. The strategic use of NGOs to mitigate social unrest can be traced back to Fouad Chehab's vast development and social plan during the 1950s (Abi Yaghi, Yammine & Jagarnathsingh 2019; Aby Yaghi & Troit 2020: 162). NGOization cannot be reduced to the outcome of a strategy from the authorities as it also relies on internal dynamics within the Lebanese society and on transnational resources and networks

of action. However, we can point to a clear strategy emerging from the authorities to depoliticise Lebanese NGOs,[441] as politics of sectarianism take advantage of NGOization for their own perpetuation, as shown by Salloukh et al. (2016). They argue that post-war political elites have shifted NGOs' agendas towards accommodation and reform within the existing sectarian system:

> 'CSOs are subjected to both coercive and non-coercive means of intimidation by a sectarian/political elite determined to protect their clientelist and symbolic power', and ultimately, 'contribute to the reproduction of sectarian identities' (*ibid*: 63).

Thus, Lebanon's politics of sectarianism feeds on the depoliticisation of the civil society to manage discontent and hinder potential challenges to its order. The sectarian system itself makes it impossible for them to exert their advocacy, as this system is centralised and authoritarian in nature, thereby denying them any political space to deploy such efforts.[442] Likewise, recent reports have indicated, despite an apparently liberal legal environment,[443] a 'shrinking space of operation' for NGOs with 'a legal grey zone' facilitating control over them (Abi Yaghi, Yammine & Jagarnathsingh 2019). Indeed, the law attributes governmental authorities with large discretionary power used to prevent 'illegal' assemblies, as exemplified by the June 2022 crackdown on LGBTQ associations. Even CSOs complying with the Lebanese law face challenges, as they have to navigate a bureaucratic system characterised by unpredictable patterns and significant delays. These hurdles affect mostly NGOs suspected of representing a potential challenge to the sectarian order, as well as Syrian NGOs (based in Lebanon and operating in Syria) which have had to present non-militant objectives in order to register and benefit from external funding. For instance, House of peace, a Syrian organisation operating in Lebanon, waited two years, between 2015 and 2017, for an (unsuccessful) application for registration. Thus, they registered in Canada and started to operate in Lebanon under the umbrella of the Jésuites, which has created limitations for applying for funding and

---

[441] See chapter one, on post-culturalist accounts showing the hegemony of sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilisation as strategies implemented by sectarian and political elites seeking to impede the emergence of any semblance of rule of law (ibid.; Traboulsi 2012).

[442] Source: Interview with a representative of Kulluna Irada, Beirut, November 2021. Interview with a representative of ALEF, Beirut, December 2018.

[443] The main law governing the work of CSO is still the 1909 Ottoman Law of Associations.

in their relations with the authorities.[444] Since 2020, Syrian NGOs are not able to be registered at all in Lebanon due to accusations of funding terrorism in Syria.

In Lebanon, very few CSOs are dedicating their efforts to transforming the political system through advocacy in policy areas such as independence of the judiciary, rule of law, or constitutional and electoral reform. This includes Helem (a CSO fighting for LGBTQ rights), the Migrant Community Center, ALEF for Human-Rights, KAFA (against domestic and sexual exploitation) or Kulluna Irada (a CSO promoting legal and economic reform). The Legal Agenda is the only Lebanese CSO actually engaged in policy-making in favor of Syrian legal rights. Through strategic litigation, the organisation promotes legal and social change via the courts and public institutions, in order to improve refugee and migrant rights related to labor and asylum. Overall, the civil society in Lebanon, and in particular the anti-racist movement, has focused most of its advocacy efforts to abolish the *kafala* system and improve migrant rights rather than change the legal framework surrounding the presence of Syrian refugees. This NGO landscape also includes grassroots and volunteer-driven organisations that remain accountable to broader social struggles. On the other side of the spectrum are NGOs operating more like businesses, with corporate management structures, and which are more likely to cooperate with ministries. However, the aforementioned CSOs that are dedicating their efforts to reforming or even structurally transforming the political system through advocacy or policymaking lack leverage, the ability to shape visible political discourses and to strengthen the public sphere from below.

The Syrian 'crisis' has introduced a new humanitarian market to the country with international actors establishing a monopoly on the coordination efforts, a market expanded by the economic crisis and that has led to a 'brain drain' as it is a relatively profitable sector of employment which participates in the 'dollarisation' of the economy. This dynamic has fostered social and economic polarisation and the development of a multi-speed society.[445]Eventually, this evolution pushes Lebanon towards becoming a 'Republic of NGOs' (Fawaz & Harb 2021). Indeed, if studies on NGOization are often limited to its political dimension, there is also a

---

[444] Interview with a representative of House of Peace, Skype, April 2019.

[445] Many interviewees observed the fact that Lebanese graduates are diverted from jobs that would advocate structural change, i.e. in political organisations, militant activities, or running for elections, in favour of a depoliticised NGO sector. For instance, interview with a representative of Kulluna Irada, Beirut, November 2021.

strong economic component to it, as the aid sector represents a neocapitalist and transnational system of governance employing hundreds of thousands of individuals driven by a willingness to defend their place within this 'global meritocracy of suffering' (Cooley & Roon 2002). This sector is riddled with internal discriminatory practices and hierarchies.[446] Elizabeth Picard comes to the conclusion that 'for Lebanon, humanitarian assistance for refugees represents an industry more profitable for those who organise it than for those for whom it is intended' (2016: 324).

2. *The imposition of Western standards and knowledge systems on local NGOs and CSOs: a neocolonial logic of co-optation*

The first concrete manifestation of the power structure underpinning the humanitarian system comes to funding: the overwhelming majority of funds are received by three UN agencies and a few INGOs, while 'the direct allocation of funds to NGOs remains consistently low, with 4 percent to national NGOs and 18 percent for international NGOs' (LCRP Annual Report 2019). The rest is perceived through calls for projects launched by international institutions. Most of local NGOs and community-based organisations are excluded from the LCRP. Foreign donors impose burdensome criteria for those who apply for funding (bank accounts, specific fundraising practices, external auditing firms, etc.), excluding *de facto* most of them, and this system favors larger and more sophisticated NGOs, at the expense of smaller ones (Abi Yaghi, Yammine & Jagarnathsingh 2019).

However, as their role has been recognised as pivotal by UN agencies and international NGOs, these have attempted to nationalise their partnerships on the ground in line with the 2016 localisation agenda: in 2021, half of UNHCR activities in Lebanon were implemented by local NGOs. Tough, instead of challenging this hierarchy of dominance, this process has proved deceitfully participatory, with the role of local NGOs being limited to that of implementing partners and frontline service providers, rather than being empowered as decision-makers. The reliance on local implementing partner is one crucial difference between the UNHCR and the UNRWA, which for its parts implements itself its projects in Lebanon.

---

[446] Foreign donors impose their eligibility requirements for recruitment, i.e. the sociological profiles and cultural codes of a cosmopolitan elite, with the prevalence of the use of English and French, and a handful of internationally renowned Anglo-Saxon universities, and with huge pay gaps between international and Lebanese employees

The top-down nature of the aid sector affects both its responsibilisation and conceptualisation. Project-based funding establishes a system where donors control the levers of development as, to access vital funds, local NGOs must adjust their missions to suit their preferences and constantly 'market' themselves to external donors. Through power network, donors and UN agencies impose their knowledge systems, technologies, budgetary concerns and concepts of management, in particular their accountability mechanisms that force local actors to spend significant time on fastidious reporting. For instance, a former employee of Caritas lamented that 'with the WFP, just to get food packages for Syrian refugees, we need to show them a thousand of evidence, of documents, while it's just food, not a loan'.[447] This system promotes a dependency culture that has led to 'toxic' competition between NGOs preoccupied by their own survival.

The co-optation of local NGOs is further reinforced by the cluster approach (a system of sectorial coordination) that has favoured the development of communities of practices and epistemic communities shaped by a common language and enhanced socialisation through working groups, interagency meetings, expert meetings, LCRP coordination meetings and trainings provided by the European Union – all more or less formal spaces of diffusion of Western professionalism, standards and knowledge systems (Fresia 2009). The sense of belonging has also been through granting rewards (symbolic of not). For instance, between 2019 and 2021, the UNHCR has increased the percentage of Lebanese NGOs among its implementing partners from 30% to 50%, justifying such evolution by their 'professionalism'.[448] This system forces NGOs to adopt the depoliticised perspective of the Western humanitarian system: as a matter of fact, donor preferences exclusively go towards apolitical NGOs and humanitarian and development projects, instead of organisations fighting for the legal rights of refugees.

---

[447] Interview with a former employee of Caritas, Beirut, September 2021.
[448] Interview with a representative of UNHCR, Skype, March 2021.

B) The repoliticisation of this transnational system of governance and its power structures

In the first section, we saw that in conversations, representatives of local NGOs have repoliticised Western interests, notably by stigmatising the European agenda of externalisation. Interviewees from the Lebanese civil society testified that this agenda was perceptible in the reluctance of donors to include vulnerable Lebanese within their programs:

> 'The donors, they don't understand, they are seeing a crisis, at the beginning they thought that all the money had to go for the Syrians because they are refugees. It took them two years to include the host community'.[449]

The Brussels donor conferences have given local NGOs a (limited) platform to express their claims collectively, including their discontent towards the lack of burden-sharing and the securitisation of refugees: in their consultations with the European commission, they have urged states to 'increase the number of resettlement places for Syrian refugees, commit to improved responsibility-sharing between member states, uphold the right to asylum, continue to provide pathways to resettlement'.[450] Besides repoliticising the European agenda of externalisation, local NGOs have shed light on the contingency of the UNHCR's so-called neutral expertise as well as its apolitical and neutral policy of non-intervention.

1. *Repoliticising Western 'neutral' expertise*

In chapter two, we saw that aid policies and in particular refugee policies represent morally loaded 'systems of meaning' (Gardner & Lewis 2015: 13) that downgrade the social and political realities of some areas of the world by referring to them in terms of depoliticised and technical 'shortcomings' or 'deficiencies' that could be resolved through the 'good practices' of these organisations. The 'one-size-fits all' approach applied by Western actors was often criticised with the idea that it results in Western donors imposing their own agenda, which can be out of touch with needs on the ground. As mentioned in chapter two, these conceive of aid

---

[449] Interview with a representative of the NGO Banin, Beirut, October 2021.
[450] See: Online consultations of NGOs and CSOs for the Brussels V Conference, in Okur & Graham 2021: 401.

as a purely technical tool. Aid workers frequently argued that IOs are 'obsessed with data and their own standards' without thinking about 'the meaning of the projects',[451] and that they prioritise humanitarian, measurable and quantitative outcomes, easier to market to donors. Thus, the aid sector was often labelled as 'neocolonial', in the sense that Western practitioners impose their own prism, solutions and knowledge systems on Lebanon:

> 'Our opinion is that UNHCR employees are implementing their own goals in Lebanon. Most of the time, these are not responding to the real needs of the Syrian refugees or the host community. They are not prioritising the right things.'[452]

> 'INGOs focus too much on emergencies, not enough on long-term development. The donors, they come, they say *khalas,* this is the project, they impose. They don't want to do infrastructural work, the construction of roads, they do not come to the periphery.'[453]

> 'UNHCR people work without knowing, they impose their own standards. They will focus on 'European criteria', like children and women rights… They do not help the right NGOs and they do not go to difficult areas, like Arsaal, or the border with Syria in Akkar, because all they want is to 'make the numbers', to get quantitative results immediately.'[454]

Several policy responses from the UNHCR were criticised on the grounds that they would reflect Western knowledge systems and one-size-fits-all solutions that are not adapted to the Lebanese and Syrian realities. For instance, cash assistance, a policy rejected by many local NGOs (as well as by the government since 2009) on the basis that this would be a way to fuel tension with the host community in a country where the majority of the population does not own a bank account, was still implemented by the UNHCR.

A further point of criticism was the fact that it took until 2016 for foreign donors and UN agencies to apply a humanitarian-development prism to the Syrian response in Lebanon. This evolution stemmed from debates taking place at the global level, with the 2016 Humanitarian

---

[451] Interview with a representative of Islamic Relief, Beirut, January 2020.
[452] Interview with a representative of Dar el Fatwa, January 2020.
[453] Interview with the maire of a municipality in Akkar, December 2019.
[454] Interview with the Director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.

World Summit in Istanbul calling for a paradigm shift towards the humanitarian-development nexus (HDN). However, this approach had already been adopted long ago by Lebanese NGOs and CSOs in Lebanon, prompting the frustration of local actors:

> 'In Lebanon we don't have running water, this is not only a humanitarian crisis this is a development crisis. We don't have functioning municipalities. But it took from 2011 to 2016 for the UNHCR to understand this. When we went to Istanbul, everyone was talking about the humanitarian/development nexus, but this is how we look at crisis since the 1990s. This is Lebanon since the end of the Civil War. And now people are like, 'think about social stability, think about social cohesion, think about conflict with host communities'. We saw the development nexus since day one. When refugees are in cities, not in the desert, you have to include the host community. You cannot just bring water trucks to camps and give them water while the Lebanese do not have water.'[455]

Local NGOs and CSOs have also challenged the policy categories defined by Western norms of refugee governance, such as the distinction between refugees and migrants. In a context where resettlement quotas have been decreasing, labour migration has been highlighted as a possible fourth durable solution by several interviewees from civil society. NGOs and CSOs have called for investing in refugee vocational education and the creation of legal pathways to allow their resettlements to third countries through the right pairing of skills.[456] They argue that, while using labour migration as a possible durable solution poses many practical and ethical challenges, policies allowing refugees to use their abilities as migrant workers may offer viable opportunities for overcoming protracted refugee situations such as that of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

On the ground, local organisations denounce a 'superiority complex' of the UNHCR which monopolises activities that they could sometimes carry out better. The agency notably refuses to refer legal protection cases to local organisations, however better suited for the task (as they

---

[455] Interview with a representative of the NGO ALEF, Beirut, December 2018.
[456] For instance, Interview with a representative of Banin, October 2021.
Interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, 26 December 2018.
Interview with an employee of Teqah, Tripoli, December 2019.

know how to deal with the government), as summarised by an employee of a human-rights NGO:

'The problem with the UN, is that they think they are essential and relevant when they are not. Ok, the GoL isn't allowing you to do that. Allow other people to do that, and cooperate with them. Refer cases to us that need legal assistance that you cannot provide yourself. But you cannot tell us 'You cannot do this thing because we are a mandate organisation' and tell all NGOs that they need to go through the UN system. We can't give legal assistance to Syrians in general. Because the UNHCR can't, so nobody can.' But if you are not going to do that, someone has to do it.'[457]

Likewise, the director of a research centre explained that the WFP bypassed local organisations while conducting need assessments in 2021, resulting in bad allocation of resources.[458] Another NGO director told me that in 2020, during the COVID, the UNHCR and the WFP offered to take over their program for the distribution of food parcels to refugees and the host community. This was seen as a communication strategy: 'they knew our program was efficient and they wanted to give the food themselves, so the beneficiaries see the 'UN' banner.'[459]

The view that the aid sector is 'a system', 'a business', was widespread. The highly paid international staff salaries of UN institutions and Western NGOs and agencies were subject of criticism, with the idea that not enough of their funds reach Syrian refugees.[460] Talking about the financial waste generated by this system, a humanitarian worker said that:

'The one with the money are the one who control the system. Everyone takes advantage of the situation and gets money out of it. International employees, from NGOs, IOs, they want to keep their job. They would not do anything to jeopardise their funding, they would never dare to criticise the lack of efficiency, the political motivations… Including local NGOs: they are professional complainers, but they eat from the plate they

---

[457] Interview with a representative of ALEF, Beirut, 26 December 2018.
[458] Interview with a representative of a Lebanese NGO and Research Center, Jdeideh, November 2021.
[459] Interview with a representative of Banin, Beirut, October 2021.
[460] Local NGOs frequently assessed their staff salaries and overhead costs as less than 10% of their budget, the rest going to the beneficiaries. One organisations said that 'with donors and the UNHCR, they request 30% for the staff, 30% for capacity-building or whatever, and only 50% to 60% going to direct and indirect beneficiaries' (interview with a representative of Teqah, Tripoli, December 2019).

complain about. The 'Syrian crisis' works as a 'cash cow': everyone takes advantage of this system, except from refugees themselves.'[461]

'We can also imagine that it's because they wanna stay there with their job that they cannot openly criticise the government harassing refugees, because then, they would see their funding cut or they would have to leave. The whole fact that you create this humanitarian community is a problem: you create people with money, positions of power that they don't want to give up on.'[462]

2. *Opposing the 'neutral stance' of non-intervention*

Another aspect that prompted criticism from local NGO stems from the UNHCR's policy of neutrality and non-intervention in Lebanese state affairs and their acceptance of the political circumstances in which they intervene: in conversations, official statements and reports, LNGOs stigmatised the UNHCR and Western donors' refusal to take a critical stance and confront the government regarding the October policies, forced deportation or illegal detention of Syrians, with the request that the EU or the UN pressure the Lebanese states to loosen restrictions on Syrian refugees.[463] Thus, the 'apolitical claim' of the Western regime of refugee governance is at the core of LNGO's criticism. For instance, during the consultations of NGOs and CSOs for the Brussels V Conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', Lebanese NGOs exhorted EU states to 'resort to diplomatic pressure' for the 'expansion of legal residency, status regularisation mechanisms to protect refugees from arrest, harassment and crime' (Okur & Graham 2021). This would allow UNHCR to carry on its mandate of protection activities, in particular "prevention and responsibility to violence', 'documentation, status and protection of individuals', 'tackling discriminatory mass violence' (*ibid*.: 201). Local NGOs regret that the UNHCR 'ignores politics" while, to carry out its mandate, it should be more 'politically aware' and 'engaging' towards the authorities.[464]

The absence of public reaction from the UNHCR against municipalities implementing curfews

---

[461] Interview with a representative of a European NGO, Beirut, October 2018.
[462] Interview with an employee of Teqah, Tripoli, December 2019.
[463] LNGOs and CSOs have openly opposed the governments' restrictive policies towards refugees.
[464] Interview with a representative of Banin, October 2021.

for Syrians was subject of criticism. In 2014, while the number of curfews increased following the security crisis in the North-East, the Ministry of Interior, Nohad Machnouk, publicly condemned these curfews as they are illegal from both a national and international point of view.[465] However, he did not rule them out. This was interpreted as evidence of the apolitical prism seeing refugees as 'helpless victims' and not subject of rights, but also as a reflection of the lack of authority of Minister Nohad Machnouk, who was then widely perceived as 'irrelevant' in Lebanon.[466] For instance, a Lebanese NGO representative told me that:

> 'The curfews from the authorities were ridiculous but the response from the UNHCR was even more ridiculous. *Khalas*, these are illegal! Let's fight them in policies, let's shame them! Let's press charges against them in court. We need a human-right approach, not a humanitarian one.'[467]

In the same vein, in 2020 the WFP was criticised for relenting to the authorities and giving them precise information about 30.000 Syrian beneficiaries (such as their income, travel, political activities, etc.), information that could be further used by the Lebanese and Syrian governments and put them at risk of human-rights violations.[468]

The idea that the UNHCR's lack of condemnation as regards state and municipal authorities grants legitimacy to them and their actions violating refugee rights is widespread in the humanitarian community. As mentioned earlier, the topic of return epitomises the contradiction between the 'apolitical' norm of the Western refugee regime and its conception of state sovereignty, and the UNHCR's protection mandate. NGOs have thus urged the international community to 'exert diplomatic pressure on host countries to halt forced returns (including those motivated by coercive push factors, Okur & Graham 2021). When returns are happening anyway, they would like to 'see a more visible role for the UN and the EU in negotiating the issue of return' (*ibid*.: 99), 'international monitoring of the condition of returnees' and the

---

[465] In Lebanon, curfews can only be declared by the Council of Minister under a state of emergency or marshal law, but they have not been involved in those directed towards Syrians. Municipalities do not have the legal authority to implement them. In addition, Lebanon is part of a number of international conventions and treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, such measures are also a violation of those terms, and as well as a violation of bilateral agreements between Lebanon and Syria in terms of allowing their citizens freedom of movement in each respective territory.
[466] Interview with the director of a human-rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[467] Interview with the director of a human-rights NGO, Beirut, December 2018.
[468] Interview with a former employee of Caritas, Beirut, September 2021.

international community providing 'financial or legal support for improved access to their HLP and civil documentation rights' (*ibid.*: 65).

Thus, the depoliticisation of refugee governance and its policy of non-intervention is a core concern for local NGOs. In addition, interviewees from local NGOs and CSOs have testified that the UNHCR has excluded them from their conversations with high officials and advocacy strategies towards the government. This was a source of discontent for NGO representatives who argued that they have better understanding of how to approach the government and analyse its politics; as mentioned earlier, most UN negotiations with the government have ended in deadlock or UN agencies complying with its demands.[469]

> 'This is where the UNHCR needs collaboration and advocacy with local NGOs, not just on service provision, because they can't really get what is serious and what is not serious, what is an entry point and what is not an entry point. They don't know for instance that the current Minister of Displaced Persons does not have a strong position in his party anymore, he is sort of pushed the other way and he cannot influence the Prime Minister. UNHCR people would say, 'yeah, but Hariri appointed him', but he is no longer part of the Hariri establishment, so it is useless to spend a lot on advocacy with him, you might as well establish relations with someone who has more influence.'[470]

C) Limited repoliticisation in acts

Despite this critical distance, representatives of local NGOs are faced with a dilemma as to whether or not to conform to these depoliticising logics with the risk of being excluded from this system. Ultimately, they are forced to participate in depoliticised narratives, as to access vital funding, they are pushed to adopt apolitical concepts based on refugee needs. Opportunities to influence the functioning of an industry that remains essentially dominant and vertical are very scant. Their advocacy efforts have, however, proven effective regarding need assessments, in particular when it comes to persuading donors to include the host community among the beneficiaries. Out of the 16 Lebanese NGO representatives interviewed at the

---

[469] For instance, interview with the director of a human rights NGO, Beirut, 26 December 2018.
[470] Interview with a representative of the Legal Agenda, Beirut, January 2020.

beginning of the economic crisis (between December 2019 and February 2020), all of them asked donors to change their criteria regarding the target population so as to include more Lebanese and have indeed seen changes, even though slow to occur. For instance, the director of Akkarouna, an NGO operating in the Tripoli region and Akkar, explained that two years into the Syrian crisis, the donors started to copy their methodology for need-assessments and to fund projects according to Akkarouna's requests. In 2012, the totality of donor funds were dedicated to Syrian refugees; in 2019, they reached a balance of 50% as funds for refugees and 50% for the host community.

However, interviewees testified that the tacit lack of accountability of UN agencies has strengthened this power structure and prevented them from challenging the narratives surrounding the refugee response. They described a system where local NGOs cannot criticise when UN money is misspent or when projects are in a deadlock, because they would then be at threat of losing their funding: 'you criticise the UNHCR and the next day your contract with the UHCR is over and your funding goes from 500.000 dollars to 200.000 and nothing is done. Even if you are principled, you would not risk it.'[471] One NGO worker expressed a common frustration when he told me that 'NGOs are part of the same equation as the government, the UNHCR and donors. They have no choice but to legitimise their interests. They take money from the UN, the UN buys NGOs so they cannot criticise, and everyone takes a piece of it.'[472]

Repoliticisation does not seem to go beyond a pure exchange of views or recriminations, as Lebanese NGOs do not have the leverage that has allowed the Lebanese authorities to translate repoliticisation in actual opposition. In the end, the repoliticisation practices of NGOs rarely venture beyond the discursive sphere: they remain essentially vocal, symbolic and deployed at an individual scale.

The fragmentation of the landscape of local NGOs in Lebanon has prevented them from becoming a counter-hegemonic power in front of international actors (Troit & Abi Yaghi 2020). They are not organised within one platform, and initiatives to remedy this situation have been scattered: for instance, an NGO Forum was constituted at the beginning of the Syrian 'crisis' but gathers only a few dozen of the estimated 5000 NGOs existing in Lebanon.[473] In addition,

---

[471] Interview with an employee of Teqah, Tripoli, December 2019.
[472] Interview with a representative of a European NGO, Beirut, November 2019.
[473] Interview with a representative of the NGO forum, Beirut, December 2018.

basic information on Lebanese NGOs are not available to the public, as the MoI does not publish any registry. Lebanon Support, Daleel Madani and the Civil Society Knowledge Centre provide resources and information on the Lebanese civil society but so far, these initiatives have been limited to research and resource-sharing with no ambition to organise CSOs and NGOs within a collective structure. Several interviewees expressed their wish that NGOs would gather and unify their knowledge in one single platform, so they could capitalise on their experience to oppose the Western knowledge systems that have been imposed on them for the refugee response.[474]

Local NGOs offer a counternarrative, but whose audience is limited to its own 'epistemic community' (Haas 1992). Donor conferences, the main forum where these organisations could express themselves in a coordinated manner, are too codified and the content of their meetings remain often confidential ; these forums do not allow local NGOs to play a counter-hegemonic role regarding norms of refugee governance. Likewise, consultations with EU representatives and UN coordination meetings do not provide an actual space for conflict or deliberation. In addition, the fact that Western donors and IOs resort to the same humanitarian principles put forward by NGOs limit the autonomy of the latter and makes it difficult to take a more challenging stance.

Thus, the resistance of local NGOs amounts to a discursive behavior operated in opposition to Western norms (Hollander & Einwohner 2004) at an individual level, which rarely reaches the collective level. This provides an opportunity to operationalise the concept of repoliticisation as a way to grasp resistance processes whose conflictual dimension is discreet, invisibilised or obscured by power structures. Even if the subjective perspective of humanitarian actors is crucial to apprehend discursive repoliticisation, the resistance potential remains limited as it is not effective: repoliticisation processes do not modify the power relationship.

However, one noteworthy act of resistance from local NGOs has been to refuse funding from foreign donors or IOs. For instance, the Lebanese Red Cross, who has significantly reduced its administrative costs in order not to be too reliant on foreign funding, has several times refused funds from the UNHCR on the grounds that these were seen as more informed by political

---

[474] Source: Interview with a representative of a Lebanese NGO and Research Center on agriculture, Jdeideh, November 2021; Interview with a former employee of Caritas, Beirut, September 2021.

priorities than by the needs on the ground,[475] a strategy allowed by the significant reduction of the Lebanese Red Cross's overheads costs (so as not to be too dependent on international funding). This is an intentional, visible and recognised form of resistance (following the definition put forth by Holland & Einwohner, *ibid*.), but it remains exceptional, however, as most national and local NGOs are too reliant on foreign funding to develop such strategy.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have shown that repoliticisation represents a potential lever to challenge the power of Western donors and the UNHCR, as the narrative system surrounding the regime of refugee governance anchors its legitimacy in the proclaimed neutrality and universality of its norms. Through the stigmatisation of Western interests, local actors call into question the legitimacy of the global socio-economic and political context underlying refugee governance and the power relations and structural inequalities underpinning it. The functions of these repertoires are to resist legitimacy gains facilitated by depoliticisation, to challenge existing power dynamics, to open up space for debate and to a lesser extent, force alternative options on to political agendas.

This chapter has also assessed the disruptive and practical effects of repoliticisation on this governance system, beyond the circulation of discourses, in terms of power balance and leverage as regards the Lebanese government and civil society actors.

I have emphasised the role of repoliticisation in revealing and giving power and agency to the Lebanese government, providing a prime example of how, despite an initial structural imbalance of power, the presence of refugees was used to gain leverage: the Lebanese government has been increasingly successful in negotiating financial aid, training, and equipment from the international community, which, in return, considers this as an opportunity to externalise. Thus, this chapter adds to the literature re-thinking the nature of Lebanese statehood and challenging the 'weak state' perspective, as well as traditional views of North-South power dynamics. Given the elaborate mechanisms, formal and informal, that the

---

[475] Interview with an employee of the Lebanese Red Cross, Beirut, January 2020; interview with a representative of the Danish Red Cross, September 2019.

government has used to influence UN policies and programs, the existing literature depicting the Lebanese government as weak presents an inaccurate description.

On the opposite, the resistance of local NGOs amounts to a discursive behavior operated in opposition to Western norms at an individual level, which rarely reaches the collective level. This provides an opportunity to operationalise the concept of repoliticisation as a way to grasp resistance processes whose conflictual dimension is discreet, invisibilised or obscured by power structures. Even if the subjective perspective of humanitarian actors is crucial to apprehend discursive repoliticisation, the resistance potential remains limited as it is not effective: repoliticisation processes do not modify the power relationship.

Thus, both depoliticisation and repoliticisation tactics shed light on the role of ideas, discourses and narratives to vest refugee governance with meaning as well as to contest those meanings, and play a critical role in forging, disrupting or negotiating the relations critical to this governance. This section has given empirical validity to Petiteville (2017a: 9)'s theorisation of the 'resilience of politics' according to which 'politicisation is resilient in and out IOs **[…]** because IOs cannot totally eliminate political controversy and debates [and] international organisations are not able to avoid the resilient forms of politicisation linked to the issues they deal with'. It has also illustrated the dialectic and fluidity between depoliticisation and repoliticisation processes: if the Lebanese authorities and NGOs repoliticise certain aspects of the actions of Western donors and the UNHCR, they also accept or even take advantage of depoliticisation processes.

Chapter five: Gulf donors: an alternative model of refugee governance

This chapter examines the role of Gulf actors in responding to Syrian refugee arrivals in Lebanon and the dynamics of depoliticisation and/or politicisation of their model of aid governance. Gulf states have been excluded from the narrative on refugee governance and their contributions to shaping the refugee regime have been left relatively unexplored, as most of the literature has focused on European states and UN agencies. Yet, their policy of 'charity before hospitality' (Hitman 2019) has followed the same externalisation logic as that of European states: they have favoured financial support to refugee-hosting countries instead of receiving refugees. Indeed, from the beginning of the Syrian war, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar have been among the main bilateral donors in Lebanon as well as in Syria, Jordan and Turkey (Hasselbarth 2014; Hanafi 2017).[476]

Gulf responses to Syrian arrivals in Lebanon remain largely under-researched. Fakhoury (2019) emphasises that the participation of Arab states in the 'multi-level system' shaping the Syrian response has shed light on the absence of concerted regional or intergovernmental response (Fakhoury 2019). Schmelter (2018) shows that Gulf-funded humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees in Lebanon reveals alternative approaches in regard to operating standards, administrative procedures, reporting and contact with the local population. Carpi (2020: 415) takes a local approach by exploring the 'different shades of neutrality of Arab humanitarian assistance' to refugees in Northern Lebanon, arguing that this support cannot be problematised by the common binary between 'apolitical' and 'political' humanitarianism.

Chapter two and chapter three have pointed to the fact that Western responses to the Syrian refugee 'crisis' in Lebanon have been through the delegation to technical entities such as the UNHCR and the ICMPD. The legitimisation of their interventions strongly rely on their depoliticisation, with the promotion of depoliticised expertise and of their apolitical role. Chapter four has shown how repoliticisation, by stigmatising donors and IOs' political interests, has delegitimised their action to a certain extent.

---

[476] I exclude Bahrain and Oman from my study as their support to the Syrian response in Lebanon has remained limited.

Thus, my question revolves around the relevance of this framework when it comes to Gulf interventions. Their hybrid system does not fit the theoretical model used to describe Western donors and the UNHCR: at first glance, their interventions have not entailed the same process of depoliticisation through technocratic distancing. Gulf states still largely operate outside of the UN-coordinated response. They offer an alternative model of aid characterised by blurred lines between official and non-official donorship, weakness of the institutionalisation of aid architectures, limited monitoring and reporting mechanisms, lack of industry-specific technical expertise, and unpredictability in terms of aid amounts and channels (Tok 2015).

Their responses have been taken over by a constellation of national actors, sometimes closely associated with their political leaders, with divergences between their *modi operandi* as they deployed their own institutional mechanisms. Their governance practices have been perceived as 'politicised' to the extent that they display the religious and political origins of interventions, revealing their contingency and therefore their political character.

Humanitarianism as a dominant discourse is deeply rooted in a Western ethos and a 'civilising' mission inspired by the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Western humanitarianism dictates the language, conceptualisation and rules of the game and excludes activities that either fail to meet its standards or are rooted in other traditions (such as Zakat and contributions from religious communities). However, humanitarianism is also a key concept in Islam, as epitomised by the central notion of 'insaniyyat' (humanism). Krafess (2005: 327) has highlighted that 'acts of humanitarianism are an essential element of religious practice for the Muslim, and the Quranic and prophetic texts calling for humanitarian action, defining and ordering it are numerous'. This serves to contradict the idea that humanitarianism is essentially Western.

A widespread narrative of politicisation surrounds Gulf humanitarian donorship in a context of global pressures on Islamic aid, and has tended to discredit and underrate its contribution to local relief. In particular, this narrative stigmatises religious humanitarianism as opposed to the universalist and secular ethos of the UN, and posits that Gulf states have been using aid to support Syrian opposition groups and to promote political alliances.

This chapter unravels the construction of Gulf donors and organisations as politicised, and investigates whether this politicisation necessarily leads to stigmatisation or decreased authority. Is politicisation – politicised practices, a form of governance that places a display of its fragility and contingency at its core – necessarily delegitimising? Processes of granting legitimacy are closely linked to complex issues of power balances in the humanitarian and development spheres: it raises the questions of which people and institutions define the cognitive models holding sway in this social world and ultimately grant legitimacy or illegitimacy. I investigate potential counter-narratives to dominant discourses by looking at those stemming from representatives of Gulf charities, Gulf Red Crescent Societies, LGNOs benefitting from Gulf states, and other aid and political actors involved with Gulf donorship in Lebanon. To do so, I examine their 'organisational identity': the way these organisations present and understand themselves, the aid they provide, their religion (if applicable) and the way they seek to exert authority.

There is in the literature the prevalent idea that in order to be accepted at the humanitarian table, actors from the Global South have to 'mimic the behaviour of their Northern counterparts, adopt their language as well as their modus operandi' (Donini 2010: S225). We might therefore wonder whether an analysis of Gulf states' practices would add nuance to the institutional hegemony of Western donors and the UNHCR, and challenge the theoretical assumption that international actors are obliged to perform depoliticisation whenever they are involved in humanitarian or refugee policies.

An aid actor can be granted legitimacy based on different grounds: due to its moral values, for demonstrating consistency between these professed values and its actual behaviour, for its efficiency or for its accountability. Institutional theory has established useful categories of legitimacy (Lister 2003). The first is regulatory legitimacy, dependent on conformity with the regulatory institutions, rules and laws that exist to ensure stability and order. The second is normative legitimacy, which requires congruence between the values pursued by organisations and wider 'societal' values. The third is cognitive legitimacy, related to conformity to established cognitive structures in society. Finally, the fourth is pragmatic legitimacy, which rests on the self-interested calculations of an organisation's most immediate audience (Lister 2003: 180).

This chapter adds to the literature on the depoliticisation of international interventions that has until recently almost exclusively focused on UN and Western institutions, by extending these questionings to Gulf actors. It grasps their role with a constructivist viewpoint, through the exploration of narratives on their perceived legitimacy to intervene in refugee policies; thus, shedding light on the growing role of Gulf states in shaping the global refugee regime from the conception, projection and images revolving around Gulf donorship, to what extent their actions are known or visible, and how they integrate themselves within wider governance structures. This way, this research highlights how both de-legitimisation and legitimisation processes play a critical role in forging, disrupting or negotiating refugee governance.

The first section contextualises Gulf interventions in the wider framework of their migratory and foreign aid policies. The second section highlights that Gulf states' responses have not been through the process of technocratic distancing characterising the responses of the traditional donor community. It unravels the general narrative of politicisation surrounding Gulf donorship and the cognitive constructs affecting its legitimacy: among the international donor community, a widespread narrative stigmatises Gulf humanitarian donorship as being the result of Gulf states' strategic choices and in particular support to Islamic militancy. However, this model of governance prone to politicisation has also led to higher degrees of visibility and influence at the local level, granting them legitimacy.

The third section offers an account of the modalities and importance of religious and identity-based humanitarianism in the legitimisation of Gulf donorship. This repertoire presents both patterns of politicisation and depoliticisation. On the one hand, it is prone to politicisation: the claim to be better connected to the affected refugee communities and to take religion into consideration was to be discursively set against the equalising standards of the UN-led international humanitarian system. On the other hand, this rhetoric of philanthropy has depoliticising effect as Gulf support is presented as the result of a moral necessity.

The last section points to discourses of 'pragmatic legitimacy' revolving around the professional authority and identity of Gulf organisations and LNGOs benefitting from Gulf funds. It shows that Gulf organisations have asserted their own criteria of professionalism putting forth their concrete efficiency in responding spontaneously to local needs. Yet, they have also complied with Western donors' forms of depoliticised governmentality in order to access the field and legitimise their interventions without fully integrating the UN structures.

The initial questioning stemmed from my first fieldwork experience in Lebanon, mainly comprising interviews with political and humanitarian actors representing Western institutions: overall, the very idea of a Gulf humanitarianism was met with extremely strong scepticism. This feedback prompted me to investigate further the role of Gulf donors in Lebanon. Due to the lack of transparency, the information and analysis provided in the public domain are incomplete; I relied on a few reports by Gulf ministries, OCHA financial tracking services, UNHCR and OECD statistics, complemented by data from interviews and media reports. I encountered a number of obstacles, particularly regarding accessibility and secrecy policies to conduct interviews. Gulf institutions are opaque establishments that limit their access and are not engaged in public communication activities to publicise their humanitarian interventions. Yet, I managed to get in touch with a few representatives from their national Red Crescent Societies based in Lebanon, as well as Qatar Charity, KSRelief and the Emirati embassy. I also constituted a sample of interviews from local organisations, charities and religious institutions (in particular Dar el Fatwa) benefitting from Gulf funds in Lebanon.

I.   The context: a 'policy of charity' before 'hospitality'

To fully understand the responses of Gulf states to the Syrian refugee 'crisis' in Lebanon, it is necessary to give a brief account of their migratory policies, as well as of their emergence as global aid donors.

A) 'Illiberal transnationalism': migration management as a political tool

Gulf states have the highest amounts of migrants per capita in the world, representing at least 90% of their population.[477] Thiollet (2019) has emphasised that the Gulf model of migration management is of a hybrid and multi-situated nature, along with the prominent role of private

---

[477] With the oil economy, these countries have become a considerable locus of migration. Migrants can represent 98% of the workforce – in Qatar, they represent 99,8% of the workforce in the private sector.

actors and the sponsorship system. She goes against the traditional views that these migratory policies amount to a form of *laissez-faire* perceived as depoliticised migration management (*ibid*.) On the contrary, she insists that migration management is actually a prominent 'political tool' for Gulf states, as they have displayed a form of 'illiberal transnationalism' with a highly strict and coercive control of communities (a 'trade-off between weak control of flux and strict control of stocks'). Indeed, since the 1990s Gulf countries have attempted to reinforce their control on migration by adopting 'anti-integration' policies – denying prospect of naturalisation and socioeconomic rights along with frequent expulsions – to prevent the settlement of migrant workers inside host societies. This is partly explained by 'fears' of the presumed 'ideology', militancy and solidarity between Arab workers.[478] In the same vein, according to Hitman (2019), fears of socio-economic and existential threats around identity have informed Gulf refusal to host Syrian refugees: he explains that a mixture of political, demographic, cultural and security reasons have led to this policy, including threats to nation states, fear of social protests and of political instability, and 'demographic anxiety'.

Gulf states have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor do they recognise the concept of 'refugee'. In the end, 'Arab regional bodies and states have equated migration governance with the management of labour migration and, to a lesser extent, with the enforcement of legal migration frameworks' (Fakhoury 2019: 4). The responses of both Gulf states and European states to the 'Syrian crisis' have followed a logic of favouring financial support to refugee-hosting countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, instead of receiving refugees. Even if in the European context, this has been commented on as a policy of 'EU border externalisation' (cf. chapter three), in the Gulf, Hitman (2019) phrases this as a 'logic of charity over hospitality'. When the so-called Syrian 'refugee crisis' made headlines in Europe in 2015, many international news outlets and organisations – such as the UNHCR, Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch – publicly condemned wealthy Arab countries for their refusal to accept refugees (Françoise, 2015).[479] In response, the Saudi Foreign Ministry claimed that 'Saudi

---

[478] This explains also why from the 1980s on, they have favoured the internationalisation of flux over regional ones (as Asian workers were seen as less prone to solidarity and mobilisations than Arab workers).

[479] See for instance: Ben Hubbard. 2015. 'Wealthy Gulf Nations Are Criticised for Tepid Response to Syrian Refugee Crisis'. New York Times, September 5, 2015. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/06/world/gulf-monarchies-bristle-at-criticism-over-response-to-syrian-refugee-crisis.html [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
Or: Luay Al-Khatteeb, 'The Gulf states should do more for Syrian refugees', Brookings, 30 September 2015, available at: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/09/30/the-gulf-states-should-do-more-for-syrian-refugees/ [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Arabia has hosted around 2.5 million Syrians since the beginning of the crisis' and created access to 140.000 Syrian students, while the UAE government stated that the country had provided residency permits to more than 100.000 Syrians since 2011, joining the 140.000 more already residing in the country (de Bel-Air 2015: 3). Qatar also claimed to have eased constraints regarding residency of Syrians in the country. Even if Syrians were indeed allowed to migrate to Gulf countries through visas for family reunification and work permits, these statements cannot be sustained by available demographic data (*ibid.*: 13).

As noted by Fakhoury (2019), Gulf countries have not attempted to answer collectively to the Syrian refugee 'crisis'. Regional institutionalisation is weak when it comes to migrant and refugee policies: the adoption of agreements, in particular the 1992 Declaration for the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons, the 2006 Arab Declaration on International Migration, the 2008 Abu Dhabi Declaration and Dialogue (on ways to boost cooperation on benefits of migration and regional integration), and the 1965 Protocol for the treatment of Palestinians in Arab States, have not given way to concerted intergovernmental efforts. The role of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League have remained symbolic, and regional practices kept evolving and being applied in an *ad hoc* manner. As summarised by Fakhoury (2019: 10):

'As key protagonists in the Sunni axis that seeks to contain the Syrian regime, the Gulf States have had no strategic interest in cooperating on the issue of refugee-sharing. Enmeshed in the Syrian conflict, they fear that refugee inflows spell trouble for stability in their own countries.'

B) The 'Khaleeji' model': Gulf foreign aid

Since the 1990s, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Qatar have emerged as prominent global aid donors. However, their humanitarian diplomacy has only become the object of academic scrutiny over the last few years (Tok 2015; Hanafi 2017; Salisbury 2018; Al-Mezaini 2012 & 2017), and studies are still sparse. Most of them focus on Gulf states' strategic reasons for entering the humanitarian and development market in the Arab world post-2011. The 'Arab Spring' has indeed represented a turning point in the aid policy of

Gulf countries with their ODA doubling since then: with the rise of democratically elected popular Islamic movements perceived as threats to their monarchical regimes, they have adopted more interventionist policies to preserve their interests. More broadly, Gulf aid flows have followed a similar pattern as EU states, corresponding to regional crisis creating movements of refugees.[480]

They offer an alternative model of aid characterised by blurred lines between official and non-official donorship, weakness of the institutionalisation of aid architectures, limited monitoring and reporting mechanisms, lack of industry-specific technical expertise and unpredictability in terms of aid amounts and channels (Tok 2015). This 'Khaleeji model' prioritises emergency relief over long-term development assistance. Most of this support is sent to their regional neighbours with a 'no-conditionality' approach, a policy of non-intervention when it comes to distributing aid: thus, the bulk of their aid is provided in the form of grants instead of loans and is not conditionality attached, along with the idea that recipient countries or organisations are free to distribute according to their estimated needs, with no follow-up required. This unconditional approach is justified by an Islamic mindset, in which people help without asking anything in return.

OECD estimates indicate that they allocate approximately 1.5% of their gross national income to foreign aid, which is twice as much as the target of 0.7% set by the UN (OECD 2021).[481] In addition, OCHA reports flesh out that these four countries are among the main bilateral donors to the Syrian response in refugee-hosting countries (OCHA 2021).[482] However, it can be inferred that their actual amount of assistance is far greater than the published OCHA and OECD's statistics: Gulf donors largely operate outside of the UN-coordinated response, relying on their own organisational structures, private donations and Zakat, and they only very partially share data with the UN Financial Tracking System (Salisbury 2018). However, they are progressively integrating multilateral systems, as indicated by their participation in the OECD DAC (except from Saudi Arabia) but also in regional forums such as the Islamic Development Bank and the OPEC Fund for International Development.

---

480 For instance, they leveraged humanitarian aid in the context of the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and more recently in Yemen.

481 Source: OECD Query Wizard for International Development Statistics (QWIDS) available at: https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/ And OECD Aid Flows: https://www.aidflows.org/ [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

482 The UN estimates that Gulf donors and NGOs' contributions to the Syrian crisis amounted to 910.3 million USD in 2020 alone (UNHCR 2021, Gulf Report).

Most of the literature on humanitarianism has conceptualised the field of aid provision in terms of a largely Western system of development at the expense of other more peripheric forms, thus downplaying the fact that aid provision is a site of struggles between different aid paradigms (Tvedt 2002: 370). Recent literature has denounced humanitarianism as a neocolonial tool and narrative used to perpetuate the domination of Western countries on Arab or Muslim 'subjects'; in this vein, Asad (2015: 395) argues that modern notions of 'human' and 'humanism' legitimise a particular kind of violence that is constitutive of humanitarianism, as they humanise some and dehumanise others.

I also draw on the literature on the culture of Islamic aid – a culture that Gulf countries keep shaping and capitalising on as most of their local partners are Muslim NGOs.[483] Faith-based organisations have been on the rise since the 1970s but until recently, these charities have occupied 'a kind of parallel world, unrepresented in official statistics of aid flows and unrecognised by Western media' as a form of 'invisible aid economy' (Clarke & Titensor 2016). Petersen (2016: 168) has shown that the literature on Muslim NGOs is torn between two limiting tendencies: one 'instrumentalist understanding' questioning their effectiveness as development partners for Western institutions; and one seeing them as 'political actors' parts of the Islamic resurgence. According to her, both interpretations fail to grasp the double identity of Muslim NGOs as 'organisations historically rooted in and moving between development systems and Islamic resurgence' (4). This recent literature outlines the complexities of the dichotomy of aid: on the one hand: 'put somewhat simply, the development culture has grown out of an experience of power and hegemony, of colonising, but also out of sentiments of collective guilt and a sense of complicity in the creation of 'the distant sufferer', stemming from the same colonial legacy' (Chouraliaki 2010: 111, cited in Petersen 2016: 169-170) while 'the Middle Eastern Islamic aid culture, on the other hand, is shaped by experiences of marginalisation, of being colonised, and of the poor not as a distant sufferer, but as a fellow member of the community' (Petersen 2016: 200).

Gulf aid's politicisation has been scrutinised in the context of increasing constraints towards Islamic charities across the world, accused of striving to spread Wahhabism and supporting

---

[483] By Muslim NGO I refer to those that define themselves as Muslim, either by simply referring to Islam in their name, or by explicitly referring to Islamic authorities, traditions, or concepts in their practices.

militant groups. A strand of research published between 2005 and the late 2010s has shown the impact of the Global War on Terror, the pressure on Islamic aid and Gulf organisations to report transparently, and their politicisation and depoliticisation in this context; nongovernmental and religious charities becoming monitored by watchdog organisations, national regulators and banking compliance officers (Wigger 2005; Bellion-Jourdan 2006; Benthall 2016; Petersen 2016; Benthall & Lacy 2014).

Gulf states have therefore been progressively integrating the multilateral system, compelled by the global war on terror (which elicited stricter reporting mechanisms), in a quest for modernisation and institutionalisation, and as a way to increase their presence in predominantly Arab and Muslim regions while obtaining international recognition by Western actors. Indeed, all of them except for Saudi Arabia have participated in the OECD-DAC since the mid to late 2010s, and they started to deliver audit and aid statistics to the UN. In addition, Islamic charities have reduced their use of religion as a motivating factor to get public donations and some have adopted international codes of conduct and transparency.

C) Different identities and degrees of institutionalisation

As shown in table 1, Gulf countries' foreign aid is mainly provided bilaterally: they present different degrees of institutionalisation. Kuwait is the more advanced in this regard, described as a 'neutral pragmatic power' (Elkahlout 2020). It was the first Gulf country to engage in humanitarian action with the creation of the Kuwait Fund for Arabic Economic Development in 1961. In the following decades, in the words of Elkahlout (2020: 154):

> 'Kuwait's humanitarian aid efforts have thus shifted from acting as solely a financial donor supporting specific crisis areas in a bid to influence recipient states of their clients in the pursuit of self-interest, towards a more sophisticated networked collaborative model of humanitarian partnership.'

The institutional context of the Kuwaiti humanitarian sector is different from the centralised, top-down model of other Gulf donors in that it is much more devolved in terms of decision-making. The country has been the locus of non-governmental work in the Gulf as private charities and NGOs have been allowed more freedom to organise and fundraise with minimal

interferences from the government. Kuwait's financial regulations of charities after 9/11 have been much less strict than those imposed on other Gulf countries, which has made the collection and transfer of funds in Syria and refugee host states easier.[484] In addition, Kuwait has been annually publishing annual foreign aid reports and has developed its own online data reporting system (named KOCHA) established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to document all international contributions by NGOs in Kuwait. As further indication of the 'neutralisation' of its aid policies, the country hosted the first three International Humanitarian Pledge Conferences for Syria and acted as co-host for the 'Supporting Syria and the Region' conference in London in 2016, and is one of the main UNHCR donors.

The UAE started their official foreign aid programme in 1971 and established the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development in 1974. Research on the UAE has emphasised the shift 'from identity to politics', from the 'old Emirati humanitarianism' to the 'new Emirati humanitarianism' between the 1970s and the 2000s, as the country shifted from being influenced by 'identities' to being influenced by political interests and the government's security concerns (Al-Mezaini 2017):

> 'The new Emirati humanitarianism of the 21st century is a modernised, institutionalised and rationalised version of the earlier Emirati humanitarianism and is part of a broader national quest for international recognition of the UAE by the western humanitarian actors and acknowledgment of the UAE's leverage and presence, especially in those areas of policy and action concerning the Arab and Muslim-majority world' (Gukölp 2022: 18).

As mentioned in table 1, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stands out as the top donor worldwide based on its contributions compared to its gross national income and in 2020, more than 90% of its foreign assistance was in the form of ODA. The UAE has implemented 'visibility strategies' regarding its aid activities: in 2008, it established the Office for the Coordination of Foreign Aid, which was then subsumed in 2013 under the newly created Ministry of International Cooperation and Development, and in 2009 the UAE became the only non-

---

484 Cf. Kuwait 2002 anti-money laundering law; 2013 Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Act No.105; Ministerial Resolution No.1532 to establish a Financial Intelligence Unit in Kuwait. In mid-2015, Kuwaiti authorities sentenced five people to prison for ten years due to fundraising under the banner of assisting Syrian refugees whilst covertly funneling cash to the Islamic State.

Western and Arab country in the UNHCR Donor Support Group (Binder, Meier & Steets 2010).[485]

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are much less integrated within the multilateral aid system, as reflected by a lack of literature on their aid policies. Saudi Arabia is characterised by its strong religious diplomacy, which, since the 1970s, has financed the expansion of Wahhabism with the construction of mosques and Islamic centres. Since the establishment of the Saudi Fund for Development in 1975, Saudi Arabia's aid has been commented as 'double-sided':

> Because of its contribution to the global economic recovery and development, Saudi Arabia has won much recognition and praise from the international community. Meanwhile, as the Saudi government persists in the legitimacy of the Islamic Wahhabi doctrine, it intentionally or not cultivated the Islamic extremist groups in the process of funding the development and global expansion of Islamic Wahhabi, which has already brought threats and hidden troubles to the traditional security of the world' (Li 2019: 13).

However, since 2015 the Saudi government has begun to control religious promotion to respond to allegations of financing global terrorism. In this sense, in 2015 it established the King Salman Relief and Humanitarian Assistance Centre (KSRelief) in order to further coordinate resources and efficiently carry out humanitarian assistance. ODA is managed by the government and through KSRelief, while non-official development assistance, which still plays a predominant role, is managed by the Saudi royal family.

Qatar aid policy is more recent and has increased following events such as Israeli attacks in Gaza and Lebanon (2006) as well as the Arab Spring. Zureik (2017) defines Qatar as 'a mono state that relies on its wealth and soft power to further its interests in the Middle East and support a beleaguered Arab-Muslim state,' with panarabism and Islam as prominent aspects of its foreign policy. The 2017 diplomatic crisis has had a strong impact of foreign aid: due to allegations of supporting terrorism and its relations with Iran, a Saudi-led (and UAE) coalition

---

485 Sources: UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2017a&b; 2018; 2019), Al-Mezaini 2017, Gökalp 2020.

severed diplomatic relations with the country and initiated a blockade.[486] This has pushed Qatar to enforce strong regulations on its aid sector, limiting the number of humanitarian organisations operating abroad, and to allocate a greater proportion of humanitarian funds through multilateral organisations (including the UNHCR). What makes Qatar stands out has been his commitment to mediation efforts, embedded within 'ethical standards rooted in religious and moral conviction, commitment to peace and stability' (Barakat 2019: 2). In Lebanon (as in other countries, Barakat *ibid*.), the small country stood out for its mediator role by brokering the 2008 Doha agreement,[487] granting it an image of impartiality.

Data on Gulf foreign aid (OECD, 2021)[488]				
	Kuwait	**The UAE**	**Saudi Arabia**	**Qatar**
Volume of aid (OECD, 2021)				
Total ODA in absolute terms	388 million USD	2,5 million USD	2.1 billion USD	591.5 million USD
Evolution of % of multilateral aid on total aid				
2009	1%	0%	3%	N/A
2020	5%	8%	36%	25%
Contribution to the UN response in Lebanon (OCHA, 2021)				
% GNI	0.28%	0,93%	0.30%	0.42%
Ranking	13th donor	24th donor	15th donor (6th in 2022)	23rd donor
Volume aid	14,3 millions	2,9 millions	5,7 million	5,2 million

---

[486] In 2017, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain broke diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed a blockade on land, sea, and air, due to allegations that Qatar was supporting terrorism and too supportive of Iran. The crisis ended in January 2021 following a resolution between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

[487] The Doha Agreement signed on 21 May 2008 put an end to a year-and-a-half conflict between rival Lebanese factions, in particular Hezbollah and the governmental majority.

[488] Source: OECD QWIDS available at: https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/ And OECD Aid Flows: https://www.aidflows.org/ [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

			(22,5 millions in 2022)	
Signs of institutionalisation				
First detailed reports on foreign aid	2010	2010	2016	2009
Participation in OECD-DAC reporting mechanisms	2018	2014	Does not participate in the OECD-DAC	2016

The literature on Gulf ODA emphasises that a combination of humanitarian concerns with strong roots in Islamic traditions and regional identities, and self-oriented interests underpin such aid-giving (Tok 2015; Hanafi 2017; Salisbury 2018; Al-Mezaini 2012 & 2017). One strand of this literature draws on the premise that there exist inherent differences between the Global North and re-emerging state donors in terms of principles and policies: according to these views, motives and methods deeply different from those of the Western world and therefore pose a potential challenge to the Western norms guiding foreign aid (for instance, Ziadah 2019; Young 2017 about the UAE). Another strand of literature argues that there is no binary distinction between Western and Gulf aid, insisting on Gulf states' conformity with the OECD's norms of transparency, accountability and efficiency, and the UN's neoliberal agenda (Gökalp, 2022: 2). Donini (2010) follows a third way: he sees the traditional (Western) and non-traditional (non-Western) aid donors as belonging to two separate universes of humanitarianism, but he does not assume the moral superiority of the former over the latter: 'these two universes – and it is unclear which one contributes more to saving and protecting lives – do not necessarily meet. And when they do, misunderstandings and friction abound' (S225).

II. Politicisation as a tool of governance: displaying contingency and the source of interventions.

In this section, I unravel the general narrative of politicisation surrounding Gulf policies towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The governance mechanisms of Gulf states are politicised to the extent that their bilateral channels expose the political, religious or even individual source (private donations) of their engagements, revealing their contingency. Their responses have not been through the process of 'technocratic distancing' that has depoliticised those of the traditional donor community. Among the international donor community, a widespread narrative stigmatises Gulf humanitarian donorship as being the result of Gulf states' strategic choices and in particular support to Islamic militancy. However, this model of governance prone to politicisation has also led to Gulf states' higher visibility and influence at the local level, granting them legitimacy.

A) A politicised ethos: exposing the political and religious origin of decisions

1. *The hybridity, opacity and weak institutionalisation of intervention mechanisms*

Gulf states started being active humanitarian donors in Lebanon during the post-2006 reconstruction of Hezbollah-led South Lebanon (Barakat & Zyck 2010) without establishing permanent offices. For their Syrian response, they have deployed highly different political rationalities and technologies of governance than those of Western donors.[489] The set-up of their interventions mirrors a balance between hybridity and informality on the one hand, and progressive institutionalisation on the other. They largely operate outside the UN-coordinated

---

[489] On Qatar's commitment towards Syrian refugees, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar (2018 & 2019). On Kuwait's commitment, see Kuwait News Agency (2022). Regarding Saudi Arabia's commitment, see Saudi Embassy (2015). Regarding the UAE's commitment, see UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2017a&b); Humanitarian Logistics Databank (2022), IHC (International Humanitarian City), available at: https://www.ihc.ae/databank/ [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

response and they do not participate in the LCRP. Their responses to Syrian arrivals in Lebanon have not been delegated to a non-political or technical agency such as the UNHCR, but taken over by a constellation of national actors, sometimes closely associated with their political leaders. They deployed their own institutional mechanisms and organisational structures: each country has kept its national set-up featuring mixed systems with no sharp demarcation between public and private funding. They rely on a more direct model of governance based on two levels – from the donor state or organisation to local structures (often Islamic charities), religious institutions or political parties (Hasselbarth 2014; Schmelter 2019). Thus, Gulf states' responses have not occurred through the process of technocratic distancing characterising the response of the traditional donor community as their bilateral channels expose the national or even individual source of their humanitarian engagement.

Most of Qatar's funds for Syrian refugees in Lebanon have come from and been implemented by the Qatari Red Crescent Society, the Qatar Charity (representing its official aid policies) and the Qatar Fund for Development. Kuwait has also relied on its Red Crescent Society and on the Kuwait fund for Arab development, as well as a few Kuwaiti organisations based in Lebanon. For both countries, a significant part of this funding was sent to local NGOs and charities for implementation.[490]

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have followed a different model: most of their funds have come from individual donors and philanthropic state-owned organisations funded by prominent royals or people close to the royal family. In Saudi Arabia, KSRelief (since 2015) and the MiSK Foundation have been the most active when it comes to the Syrian response in Lebanon. From the UAE, the most active foundations in Lebanon are Dubai Care, Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI) and Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation. In addition, both the Saudi and the Emirati Red Crescent Societies have contributed to the Syrian response.[491]

---

[490] Sources: interview with a representative of Qatari Red Crescent Society, Aarsal, November 2019; interview with a representative of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent, January 2020; governmental reports; Schmelter (2019); Carpi (2020).

[491] Sources: Skype interview with a representative of KSRelief, February 2020. Interview with an attaché from the UAE Embassy, Beirut, January 2020.

The importance taken by Gulf Red Crescent Societies to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon – as non-confessional entities part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – can be read as a prioritisation of state branding to gain international recognition as transparent and neutral humanitarian actors. They display nuanced degrees of autonomy: since 2006 the Qatari Red Crescent Society has its permanent office in Lebanon while the other Red Crescent Societies operate with temporary missions in Lebanon – in particular, the Saudi Red Crescent Society has the status of a quasi-governmental agency with highly limited autonomy. As the Lebanese Red Cross, Arab Red Crescent Societies distinguish themselves by their ability to operate in hard-to-reach border and rural areas in Akkar and Beqaa, neglected by the UN and Western organisations, including in difficult weather conditions (storms, heavy snow, etc.).

In addition to numerous short-term missions to distribute in-kind donations to Syrian refugees during Ramadan and winter (with winterisation campaigns), Gulf states have deployed more 'modern' modalities of emergency support such as cash assistance programmes (for instance by MBRGI). They have strongly invested in the health sector with the construction of hospitals or divisions dedicated to Syrian refugees. In addition, Gulf actors have implemented long-term and development activities for Syrian refugees, with the provision of education and infrastructure (which nuances recent literature emphasising that Gulf aid is still mostly geared towards short-term relief). For instance, KSRelief has been involved in a range of social welfare initiatives, Dubai Care has supported second shift schools and launched a literacy initiative for Syrian children, the Qatar Charity has opened vocational training institutes, etc. Kuwait's support to the education sector for Syrian children reflects the compromise between the culture of development aid and the culture of Islamic aid: on the one hand, it is one of the top donor countries for UNICEF and the RACE programme in Lebanon; on the other hand, it has opened a network of charity-run schools for Syrian children, with an emphasis on religious classes in the conservative areas of Tripoli and Akkar.

2. *An ad hoc and direct model of governance prone to politicisation*

According to interviewees, three factors have rendered Gulf interventions prone to politicisation. First, their lack of regularity, showing their dependency on religious and political agendas. Second, their direct association with Gulf countries as they operate bilaterally and

without the 'technocratic distancing' deployed by EU donors, drawing a system where the source of commitment is identifiable. According to this narrative, Gulf states' values and interests translate, on a practical level, into a refusal to integrate into multilateral institutions and channel their aid through them, and a lack of transparency and control mechanisms. These quotes from representatives of Gulf-funded charities dedicated to Syrian refugees in Lebanon and of the Palestinian Red Crescent capture this idea:

> 'With the Syrian crisis, Gulf organisations follow this reactive, *ad hoc* approach, like they do in Yemen. They depend on their communities, and the donations from the people and the royal family. While Western donors have a more institutional approach. You need a proposal, to show that it is feasible, the amount of money is more regular.'[492]

> 'The Arab Red Crescent, they enjoy working according to their own mind. They don't like to cooperate. Once, the Qatari Red Crescent came from the airport. The Lebanese Red Cross had to stop them. 'Hey, we are here, we are the Lebanese Red Cross. You have to come to us.' So now they cooperate. While the Canadian, French, British Red Cross, they cooperate very well, in an official manner, coming from the door they have to come from.'[493]

> 'Gulf states, they don't have good visibility. They don't participate in multilateral meetings. I don't know if they don't want or they are not invited or both. There is no attempt to coordinate, to be visible.'[494]

Gulf states do not participate in the LCRP, nor did they coordinate with national authorities (until a few years ago, cf. last section of this chapter). In addition to direct implementation, Gulf organisations also fund projects implemented by local actors. They have established their own coordination structures that function largely outside of the UN system. Among the network of organisations Gulf-funded, we can find secular NGOs, Islamic charities, religious actors – in particular, the bulk of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's aid goes through the Relief and

---

[492] Interview with a representative of URDA, November 2021.
[493] Interview with a representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent, Saida, January 2020.
[494] Interview with a representative of a Syrian Charity, Aarsal, January 2020.

Humanitarian Aid Authority, one of Dar Al Fatwa institutions, the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon.

B) Discursive construction of Gulf interventions as politicised

This subsection unpacks the general narrative about Gulf donorship and the cognitive constructs affecting its legitimacy. Before delving into this, it is important to keep in mind the lack of visibility of Gulf interventions in Lebanon: the overwhelming majority of the people interviewed from the UN or Western institutions have shown a limited to non-existent knowledge concerning them.[495]

First and foremost, this narrative problematises Gulf aid based on the assumption that Gulf states have motives different from the Western norms guiding foreign aid, and stigmatises Gulf humanitarian donorship as being merely the result of national and strategic choices diametrically opposed to humanitarian ideals. It posits that Gulf states have been using aid to support Syrian opposition groups operating in Lebanon and to promote alliances with specific Lebanese political parties. This was reflected during my fieldwork by the omnipresence of a 'political realist' repertoire expressed by the interviewees, emphasising that Gulf States have been using aid to implement a soft power diplomacy specifically targeted at the presence of Syrians in order to promote their strategic interests. In conversations, local actors emphasised Gulf countries' political priorities much more frequently than those of European countries, unilaterally arguing that Gulf States' political vision has informed their support to the Syrian response.

When asked the reasons behind the Gulf engagement, the overwhelming majority of Gulf partners answered something correlated to their political alliances or to their interest in supporting the Syrian opposition. Indeed, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and especially Qatar have been very vocal in their condemnation of the brutality of the regime towards protesters at the beginning of the Syrian revolution and have strongly opposed the Syrian regime. Governments and individuals also actively supported the opposition until 2017, with financial remittances,

---

[495] For instance, interview with representatives of a European embassy, Beirut, January 2020 and of a French state representative, Paris, February 2020; interview with a representative of EEAS, Brussels, February 2020.

large-scale supply of weapons and ammunition to various rebel groups, within and outside of Syria, sometimes through charitable structures. Even the UAE, though distinguishing itself by its cautious approach to Syria due to its large Iranian population (Al-Mezaini 2017), has initially supported groups and militias to topple the regime. This support has quickly vanished around 2013-2014, and from 2017 Gulf states have taken a more conciliatory stance towards the Syrian government while the UAE played a pioneer role in the normalisation of Arab states' relations with Damascus with the opening of its embassy in 2018.[496] Yet, external observers were often conflating humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees with militant support to opposition groups. For instance, according to a local elected official from Tripoli, in his city:

> 'Qatar was supporting many Islamic organisations with high amounts. It seems that, politically, they wanted to support refugees if they were fighting the regime in Syria. Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported groups like ISIS, Al-Nusra with humanitarian money and weapons and they sent fighters from North Lebanon. So it was not so much about refugees than about fighting the regime.'[497]

Against this backdrop, support for Syrians is seen as part of this wider strategy of political alliances: Gulf support to parties belonging to the March 14th alliance and to Islamic NGOs have been suspected to convey the disguised objective to support Syrian opposition groups operating in Lebanon and to promote alliances with specific Lebanese political parties. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and the UAE both support the March 14th March movement led by the Future Movement of former Prime Minister Hariri, who opposes the Syrian regime. In addition, they oppose the March 8th movement and especially Hezbollah, which supports Damascus. Gulf states have cooperated with the Future Movement and the Hariri Foundation for aid distribution.[498] Parties belonging to the March 14th alliance sympathise with some segments of the Syrian opposition and are the ones that have provided aid to Syrian refugees. For instance, an officer from Dar al Fatwa said that:

> 'Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, all of them have their own offices in contact with their

---

[496] See: Daher J., 'The UAE and Damascus: The Normalisation of the Syrian Regime', November 2021. https://blogs.eui.eu/medirections/the-uae-and-damascus-the-normalisation-of-the-syrian-regime/
[497] Interview with a member of Tripoli municipal Council, Beirut, October 2019.
[498] Skype interview with a representative of KSRelief, February 2020. Interview with an attaché from the UAE Embassy, Beirut, January 2020.

embassy. They work in parallel, not together. Because everything is politics now: the Saudi will not go to Hezbollah and give them money. Because they don't support this line. So, they will go to the Sunnis'.[499]

'It's always politics, this is very obvious. And people working here to distribute humanitarian aid are in direct contact with the government of UAE or KAS and they take the whole vision of the government. For instance, they cannot support Jamaal Islamiya or Al Nusra[500] because they are against the vision of the Arab leaders. So, we can't support these people.'[501]

Indeed, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's conservative Sunni ruling families perceive the Muslim Brotherhood as an ideological competitor and its promotion of political activism as a direct threat to its dynastic system of rule.

The idea that Gulf interventions in Lebanon may lead to the risk of funding religious fundamentalism and/or terrorism was also extremely prevalent. As mentioned earlier, Gulf aid's politicisation has been scrutinised in the context of increasing constraints towards Islamic charities across the world, accused of striving to spread Wahhabism and supporting militant groups (Bellion-Jourdan 2006; Salisbury 2018; Benthall & Lacey 2014). Even though during this past decade, Gulf countries have strongly disengaged from funding Wahhabism, in Lebanon Gulf funds have been subject to strong de-risking. This narrative is still widespread: for instance, according to a representative of GIZ (the German international cooperation agency):

'Gulf states changed but it does not mean that they control everything. A private person can provide money, spend cash, there is no legislation, you don't know where the money go to. One of the allegations is that they are building schools and they want ultimately to spread their vision of Islam by developing specific curricula. For a long time, it was one soft power tool to export Wahhabism. The Saudis have bad experiences with supporting militant groups, Salafists, Wahhabis, etc. You would think they learned the

---

[499] Interview with a representative of Dar el Fatwa, January 2020.
[500] A branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.
[501] Interview with a representative of the UAE embassy, 15 January 2020.

lesson, but we don't know if that is true. We cannot check and control everything.'[502]

Geopolitical priorities were stressed by local NGOs to explain why some Gulf-funded programmes stopped in 2016, as Gulf governments' strategic focus shifted from Syria to Yemen.[503] 'Now, all their eyes are on Syria at this point. And Yemen: Saudi Arabia has moved the military and humanitarian capacities to Yemen.'[504] Likewise, a representative of Dar al Fatwa told me that:

> 'The Emirati support decreased because they lost money with oil prices, and the war in Yemen, all the money has been going to Yemen from three years ago. Same for Saudi Arabia. They need to see a crisis. And the UAE just transferred 1,5 billion dollars to Syria, two or three months ago, so there is no money left for Lebanon.'[505]

In the same vein, a local representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent's office in Lebanon said that 'they did not receive funding from other Arab Red Crescent Societies' because of 'some political agendas behind that'.[506] My interviewees further emphasised that Gulf refugee policies have been informed by political choices: leaders' personalities were often invoked as a crucial motive. For instance, a representative of the UAE embassy said that 'now, the Saudi are also supporting non-Muslims in Lebanon: this is because Mohammed Bin Salman came to power. He is more open'.[507] This quote from a representative of a European aid agency expresses the same logic:

> 'Funding stopped in 2016 because Saudi Arabia and the UAE realised that the support that they provided to militant groups was not in their favour. Bachar al-Assad was not weakened and their reputation suffered internationally so they decided to stop. Sometimes, it has been a personal decision by a specific influential personality in these countries. Especially in Saudi Arabia, when there is a new minister, a new head of

---

[502] Skype interview with a representative of GIZ, February 2020.
[503] For instance, interview with the director of a charity, Tripoli, 21 November 2019; interview with the director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[504] Interview with a representative of Rahma Medical Center, Tripoli, January 2020.
[505] Interview with a representative of Dar el Fatwa, January 2020.
[506] Interview with a representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent, Saida, January 2020.
[507] Interview with a representative of the UAE embassy, January 2020.

security services…'[508]

I posit that displaying the political or personal source of those humanitarian interventions, by revealing their contingency and therefore their political character, is in itself a politicised practice. Gulf donors' interventions therefore come up as much more overtly politicised than those of Western donors; and local actors' discursive practices play an active role in their social co-construction as 'politicised actors': NGOs and institutions benefitting from Gulf funds participate in conveying the vision of Gulf humanitarian donorship as resulting from Gulf States' political choices and calculation.

As a result, Western donors are wary of Gulf donors and of how their reputation could reverberate on them. According to a representative of GIZ, in Lebanon 'there is [still] a lack of control mechanisms [that] could be used to spread Wahhabism and the financing of terrorism' – therefore, the 'reputational risk' associated with working with Saudi Arabia or Kuwait has prevented his organisation from increasing cooperation:

> 'We need to assess our interests on the German side. We need to balance the issues coming with working with Gulf charities, in particular possible reputational risks associated with militant groups. So we need to wonder: what can we gain from working with Gulf organisations? What is their added value on the ground? Ultimately, this is a political decision to be taken by the Ministry in Germany, but also an assessment of the technical level.'[509]

This quote reflects the 'instrumentalist' viewpoint that, according to Petersen (2016), is prevalent in the literature about Muslim charities and which tends to see these through a reductive dichotomy: either through an assessment of their effectiveness as development partners, or as 'politicised' actors. For GIZ, the idea was to assess whether their 'added value' on the field (in particular, their access to beneficiaries) balances reputational risks associated with working with them.

---

[508] Interview with a representative of a European aid agency, February 2020.
[509] Skype interview with a representative of GIZ, February 2020.

I mentioned in chapter four that the repoliticisation of Western interventions largely consists in emphasising the fact that European states send humanitarian money to Lebanon to keep refugees at bay. It is noteworthy that the discursive politicisation of Gulf interventions does not entail this stigmatisation of externalisation logics, despite Gulf donors funding many long-term, livelihood projects that could be perceived by the Lebanese authorities as reflecting this 'hidden agenda' to integrate refugees in Lebanon that they were prompt to denounce regarding EU donors. The lack of this specific type of politicisation could be explained by several factors: first, Gulf states do not recognise the concept of refugee nor do they play any role in border policies, a crucial aspect of refugee governance. Second, most of their support has been sent with a 'no-conditionality' approach, thus the contractual logic inherent in externalisation is absent. Finally, their hybrid system of aid makes it less prone to theorisation.

C) Suspicion and marginalisation

This politicisation of Gulf donorship – referring here to 'allegations that objectives and activities could be military and militants rather than humanitarians' (Bellion-Jourdan 2006: 183) – has marginalised them vis-à-vis the Western donor community. This attitude of distrust has challenged Gulf participation in refugee governance, with de-risking policies limiting transfers from Gulf countries. Indeed, the international banking system has become increasingly sensitive to the risks of having Islamic charities as clients. During the fieldwork, I put together a sample of 48 NGOs receivers of Gulf funds; half of them stopped receiving these funds around the years 2015-2016 because of de-risking. For instance, Al Fares, an Akkar-based Sunni charity located in the vicinity of Halba, was benefiting from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatari funds. This small charity organisation with a team of a hundred employees and volunteers was then providing free education for 2000 Syrian children, as well as nutrition and psychosocial support. Yet, from one day to the other in 2018, with no official warning, the three countries cut their funding:

> 'In 2018, we stopped receiving from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar. We only assumed it
> was due to financial transformation, problems of banks and corruption in Gulf countries.

It became illegal for these countries to come to Lebanon. So we had to reduce the school's capacities by 75%.'[510]

The Islamic Medical Association, a volunteer association based in Tripoli but with centres in Beqaa and Qalamoun, has strongly relied on Gulf funding in 2011 and 2012, when thousands of refugees passed the Northern border to flee from the exactions of the regime. The Islamic Medical Association then provided emergency support with the Lebanese Red Cross: according to a representative, Gulf countries were much quicker to send funds than EU donors (due to their lengthy bureaucratic restrictions). However around 2016-2017, they 'lost [their] Saudi, Kuwait and Qatari support':

> 'It was for political reasons. Because of counterterrorism, and because at the time, the USA thought it was not well seen to be financed by countries like Saudi Arabia. They asked them why they were sending these funds. Saudi Arabia was under suspicion from the USA, which reflected on other countries. Any money coming from these countries is now suspect.'[511]

In addition, my interlocutor estimated that the suspicion was also directed at its own organisation due to the word 'Islamic' in its name: 'The fact that our name was 'Islamic something' did not help. There is a strong suspicion around this word'. A similar testimony was given by a representative of Islamic Relief: 'we are affected by de-risking. They see 'Islamic', and it gives them headaches, they say: 'I don't want to deal with this business.''[512]

The first years of the Syrian crisis, Gulf countries operated through a myriad of organisations, making it harder to trace their activities, which led to the blacklisting of some of their aid organisations, with significant impact on the field.[513] In particular, the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis prompted the blacklisting of Qatari aid organisations because of allegations that they were funding political Islam in the region:

> 'In Qatar there is a government body entity that controls humanitarian money from

---

[510] Interview with a representative of Al Fares, Halba, January 2020.
[511] Interview with the director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[512] Interview with the director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[513] Interview with a representative of Muslim Aid, Aarsal, November 2019.

Qatar to the world. Before the blockade there were four organisations, Qatar Charity, Qatari Red Crescent, Eid Charity and a last one … The Saudi froze two, put the names on the blacklist, and they kept only the Qatar Charity and the Qatari Red Crescent. They were afraid things weren't under control.'[514]

D) Politicisation leading to increased visibility

Finally, I point to the fact that politicisation – politicised practices, a form of governance that places a display of its fragility and contingency at its core – is not necessarily delegitimising. A politicised ethos can actually increase visibility and legitimacy. Gulf support being more likely to be channelled through bilateral rather than multilateral channels, this leads to increased recognition for donor nations – while 'pooling donor funds to leverage impact and support global institutions tends to reduce donors' influence and visibility as investors' (Gulrajani & Swiss 2019: 11). This identification is strengthened by the ad hoc, informal nature of their support: 'every other month, the Emirati come, they send a team, money, in-kind donation… Before, it was the Kuwaiti government but they stopped, at the Emirati stepped up.'[515] In his words, this NGO director does not specify whether he refers to the Red Crescent Society, an organisation, the Ministry … The 'identity' of the humanitarian entities is merged with that of the state. This grants Gulf states more visibility than European states operating through the UN. Likewise, a municipal advisor from Baalbeck told me that 'around Baalbeck, the Qatari administer a refugee camp, then there is the Emirati camp, the Saudi camp, the Kuwaiti camp, and then you have the UNHCR camp.[516]

In this regard, the role of Qatar and its flagship organisation – the Qatari Red Crescent – in Aarsal is emblematic. In Lebanon, Qatar played a mediator role by brokering the 2008 Doha agreement, granting the small country an image of impartiality. In addition, it has provided relief aid after the conflict of July 2006: it contributed the most per household to housing compensation, and studies even suggest that positive perceptions of Qatar have come at the expense of the Lebanese state (Barakat & Zyck 2010: 43). Contrary to other Gulf Red Crescent, the Qatari Red Crescent Society has established permanent offices in Lebanon in 2013, covering

---

[514] Interview with a representative of the Qatari Red Crescent, Aarsal, January 2020.
[515] Interview with the Director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[516] Interview with a municipal counsellor, Baalbeck, February 2020.

border areas (hosting large refugee populations) that are usually neglected by IOs, such as Aarsal, Wadi Khaled, and Shebaa. Aarsal, a border town in the Beqaa located on the border with Syria was, between 2014 and 2017, exposed to conflicts involving the Islamic State and al-Nusra on the one hand, and the Lebanese army and Hezbollah on the other.[517] Despite the security situation, the Qatari Red Crescent arrived in 2015 and has stayed until today. According to a former employee, the Qatari Red Crescent struggled to get accreditation because of security protocols at a time when most aid organisations were leaving Aarsal. In 2017, interviewees testified that Qatar played a key role in the negotiations between the different parties involved, which is in line with its role of third-party mediator and reputation as key player in conflict-affected contests (Barakat 2019: 3).[518]

Now, the Qatari Red Crescent is quite visible in Aarsal's landscape as they administer refugee camps (with the omnipresence of the Qatari Red Crescent logo). They have played a key role in upgrading water purification plant and potable water supply to refugee camps, and improving education and health centres. Thus, in some places in Lebanon and in particular in the peripheries, where the UN ventures less, Gulf countries' humanitarian presence is more visible than that of Western donors, and this is further reinforced by their preference for bilateral channels.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

These findings challenge the theoretical assumption that international actors are obliged to perform depoliticisation when they are involved in humanitarian or refugee policies. Politicisation is a tool of governance: those practices shape refugee governance in the same capacity as depoliticised practices. Therefore, the politicisation of humanitarian action is not only a form of resistance against its depoliticisation but it can also produce governance – a form of governance placing the display of its fragility and contingency at its core. As shown, the depoliticised narrative embraced and diffused by Western donors and the UN is challenged by

---

[517] Interview with a former representative of the Qatari Red Crescent, Aarsal, November 2019.
[518] Indeed, since 2013 Qatar's foreign policy has focused on single-issue mediation mostly run by its Intelligence Department, such as prisoner exchange and release of hostage, and driven by a humanitarian imperative. Over the last years, it has negotiated the release of hostages and prisoner exchanges in Iraq, Syria, Sudan, and Gaza.

a counter-narrative of repoliticisation: do we observe a similar dialectic with the erosion of politicised narratives?

III.   Religious and identity-based humanitarianism`

This section points to the importance of religious and identity-based humanitarianism in the legitimisation of Gulf donorship, a repertoire of interventions presenting both patterns of politicisation and depoliticisation. The distinction between secular and religious humanitarianism is a central aspect of the dichotomy between the culture of Western development and that of Islamic aid enhanced by Gulf donorship. Religious humanitarianism is prone to politicisation: the claim to be better connected to the affected refugee communities and to take religion into consideration was to be discursively set against the equalising standards of the UN-led international humanitarian system. NGOs that are (or are assumed to be) inspired by religious values are often believed to have an inherently problematic relationship with neutrality (Ferris 2011: 618). In her study on Lebanon, Carpi (2020) nuances this idea: she points to 'different shades of operational neutrality' in Gulf-promoted humanitarianism against the idea that they necessarily lack neutrality. She insists on the complexity existing behind the dichotomy between 'the Geneva-born international humanitarian agencies [that] aspire to be held accountable by their beneficiaries by embracing impartiality and asserting political neutrality' and 'Arab Gulf-funded NGOs [which] overtly share their political aims [and] make the political moral'. In the same vein, this section shows that religious humanitarianism also presents patterns of depoliticisation as Gulf support is presented as the result of a moral necessity.

A) Religious humanitarianism in Gulf interventions

Despite a perceptible shift towards secularisation with increasing amounts of aid channelled through the UN, there is undeniably a strong religious component in Gulf activities, visible in their choice of operational partners to transfer funds, based on religious grounds, such as Sunni charities, and religious institutions and authorities such as muftis, in particular in Beqaa and Akkar. Since 2013, the bulk of UAE and Saudi funds (more than 60%) goes through the Relief and Humanitarian Aid Authority of Dar Al Fatwa institutions, the highest Sunni authority in

Lebanon.[519] Both countries rely on this institution for establishing lists of beneficiaries, thereby targeting in priority Sunni communities. This way, they draw their authority and legitimacy through association with existing recognised and religious authorities.

Gulf organisations and Lebanese organisations recipients of Gulf funds display a highly visible, all-encompassing organisational religiosity that influences all aspects of aid provision, centring on notions of Muslim solidarity and echoing core elements in the Islamic aid culture. Even organisations introducing themselves as secular have strong religious overtones: this is the case with many Arab-funded local NGOs presenting unclear organisational profiles (between secular NGOs and Sunni charities), as well as transnational Muslim NGOs such as Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid. All these organisations feature typical Islamic charitable programmes specifically targeted for 'sponsorship of orphans' – an old Islamic tradition highly popular with Muslim charities, assistance to 'widows' and 'families of martyrs' of specific political background, assistance to women-headed households, etc., which produces humanitarian subjects embedded in their religious or social communities. They also carry out food and clothes distributions during Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and other religious holidays, as well as religious and community activities during the provision of aid. In their brochures and websites, they emphasise the importance of da'wa (education to diffuse religious beliefs), mosque services, Qur'an lessons, and other charitable activities.

The 'victims' or 'beneficiaries' produced by Gulf humanitarian practices are thus always contextualised and embedded within their religious communities. When asked to detail their categories of beneficiaries, interviewees from Gulf-funded NGOs would sometimes refer to religion as a first criterion; for instance, a representative of the humanitarian division of Dar Al Fatwa said that 'at the beginning of the crisis, 90% of Saudi funds were geared towards Sunni people' (and only later did he mention that the overwhelming majority of them were Syrians).[520] In addition, the financial model of these organisations is embedded in principles of charitable giving: besides institutional funding, they count on individual donorship, drawing on the potent religious idioms of Zakat (mandatory and individual alms),[521] Sadaqa (a voluntary, non-fixed

---

[519] Interview with a representative of Dar el Fatwa, January 2020.
Interview with an attaché from the UAE Embassy, Beirut, January 2020.
[520] Interview with a representative of Dar el Fatwa, January 2020.
[521] Zakat or almsgiving is one of the five pillars of Islam and obligatory and continuous activity for all believers as the religious obligation for Muslims to give annually 2,5% of one's wealth every year should go to charity.

amount of charitable giving, usually for sudden unforeseen crisis) and Waqf (charitable donation of assets). Gulf-funded organisations receive a significant part of their funding according to the religious calendar: representatives of Gulf-funded organisations emphasised that their 'best' fundraising month was always that of Ramadan.[522]

Muslim NGOs in Lebanon are best conceptualised as part of both the 'culture of development aid' and the 'culture of Islamic aid'. Petersen (2016) posits that these are not inherently oppositional: they are temporary and historically specific, constantly changing and over time merging into new cultures. Gulf-funded Lebanese NGOs illustrates this fact. For instance, the Union of Relief and Development Associations (URDA) is a charitable institution founded by the Muslim Brotherhood at the beginning of the Syrian crisis with the gathering of thirty existing charities which felt the need to coordinate their humanitarian efforts under one strong umbrella to answer refugees' needs. URDA administers a dozen camps in Beqaa, Akkar and Mount Lebanon as well as four medical centres. In charge of a substantial orphan sponsorship programme, its communication is strongly based on Islamic donations and it receives strong institutional support from Gulf states. Yet, it also receives money from European donors, presents itself as an NGO rather than a charity, and participate in UN cluster meetings. Likewise, Thiqah is a charity organisation that has considerably expanded in size and scope with the Syrian crisis thanks to Gulf funding. It delivers cash and in-kind assistance for 140.000 families (mostly Syrians), operate one hospital in Akkar with a section for Syrian refugee cases and implements a sponsorship programme for Syrian orphans in North Lebanon:

> 'We are a charity because we do sponsorship of orphans and food distribution. But we are also a development organisation, we do livelihood, skills, protection. We are not a religious organisation, and we are not with any party. But most of our beneficiaries, Syrian refugees, are Sunni, so, we have to talk their language to reach them more effectively.'[523]

The identification with certain symbols for development actors has been shown in the literature (Lister 2003: 182). In Lebanon, Gulf-funded organisations identify with certain symbols such

---

[522] For instance: Interview with representatives of the Rahma Centre for Community Services; Interview with a representative of the Rahma Medical Centre.
[523] Interview with the director of Thiqah charity, Tripoli, November 2019.

as 'Sunni' but also 'Arab' to enhance their own legitimacy. Even openly secularised Gulf organisations or partner organisations emphasise their allegiance to an Islamic aid culture. Despite their non-confessional character, Arab Red Crescent Societies take religious overtones: the 'semiotics of [their] emblems have a complex history' (Benthall & Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 45-68) and in Lebanon, they carry out Ramadan distributions and orphan sponsorship.

In Lebanon, Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief promote the compatibility of international humanitarian standards with policies that are guided by Islamic values. These 'paradigmatic cases of transnational Muslim NGOs' (Petersen 2016) are both UK-based, largely secularised, 'increasingly embedded in a Western development culture' (*ibid*.) and participate in all UN cluster groups in Lebanon. However, in addition to institutional funding they rely a lot on charitable giving from Gulf countries, and orphan sponsorship programmes for Syrian refugees play a key role in their communication strategy.

The literature has shown that Gulf donors and Muslim charities capitalise on shared history and cultural and religious proximity in their interventions to facilitate their access to the field. Gulf states have highlighted their Arab Islamic heritage as part of national-branding policies for beneficiaries in Arabic-speaking and Muslim-majority countries, 'claim[ing] a space of aid intervention capitalising on the decades-long violence, exploitation, mistrust and negligence that defined the relations between the western donors and the nations in the Arab and Muslim-majority world' (Gökalp 2022: 13).

However, the religious activities carried out by Gulf-funded organisations have also been under scrutiny. The network of charity-run schools established by the Kuwaiti Society for Humanitarian Excellence for Syrian children in poor areas of Tripoli and Akkar has been criticised, in particular by the MEHE and the UNICEF for encouraging a parallel system of education taught in Arabic and based on the pre-war Syrian curricula (while the Lebanese curricula is in French or in English). Officials have voiced their concerns that these schools do not provide children with the accreditation certificate that would allow them to pursue their education in Lebanon or even in Syria in case they return in the future. The religious content of these schools was also a central argument of such criticism. Ahmed is a Syrian who, in 2013, was hired in one of these Kuwait-funded schools in Tripoli. He voiced concerns about the future of the Syrian children, but also regarding the religious content of teaching: 'the religious content was too much, and also a version of Islam that should not be taught in school. The aim was

more religious than educational or humanitarian.' This pushed him to quit his position after one year, to be hired by a second-shift school.[524]

Islamic humanitarianism relies on the core values of solidary and justice, which are more prone to politicisation than the values of universalism and neutrality put forth by Western humanitarianism (Krafess 2005). Choosing partners and beneficiaries based on their religious affiliation is perceived as a politicised practice that has marginalised Gulf donors against the traditional donor community. Identity-based humanitarianism has been delegitimised for going against the logic of the contemporary humanitarian landscape, dominated by a 'functional secularism' whose universal claims serve to discredit alternative narratives (Ager & Ager 2011: 456): 'while in principle 'neutral' to religion, in practice this framing serves to marginalise religious language, practice and experience in both the global and local conceptualisation of humanitarian action'.

B) Depoliticisation through emphasis on refugee needs and through moral evaluation

Chapter two has emphasised that the UNHCR deploys a hegemonic discourse on humanitarian governance based on its expertise to answer depoliticised refugee needs. I point to a similar logic in the rhetoric of Gulf organisations and Gulf-funded charities. As with the UNHCR and Western NGOs, Syrian refugees are presented as humanitarian victims and never as victims of human rights violations by the Syrian and Lebanese regimes: in their communication and in interviews, these organisations insist on the necessity to 'attend to the urgent needs of the poor'[525] and the 'suffering' of the Syrian people. This is reflected by the materialisation of the idiom of refugee non-controversial needs in their reports, leaflets and visual rhetoric with iconography of vulnerability.[526] For instance, the Rahma Centre for Community Services is a Saida-based charity providing vocational education for Syrian orphan girls, which was founded

---

[524] Interview with a Syrian teacher, Tripoli, December 2019.
[525] The 'poor' is one of the eight eligible categories of beneficiary listed in the Qur'an.
[526] For instance, see UNHCR Lebanon – operational factsheets (2019); and the statement of Ayaki Ito, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon, on 15 March 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/lb/14303-a-lost-decade-for-syrians-a-stark-reminder-of-the-failure-to-solve-the-biggest-humanitarian-crisis-of-our-time.html/ [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

by the Rahma International Society in Kuwait. Maha, the Director, specified that 'we are a charity centre: we are looking for the neediest girls, orphans, who could never study otherwise. We also distribute food parcels to Syrian people who are in need.'[527] I identified a similar rhetoric in the words of a representative of URDA:

'With the Syrian crisis, we gathered thirty organisations because there was the need for a better humanitarian intervention for the refugees. Our humanitarian work is primarily based on the needs of the suffering and the poor. Our common goal is to present a perfect humanitarian work. Our organisation represent all communities, Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, with no political or religious aim. But we focus on 70% on Syrian refugees.'[528]

These quotes, respectively from representatives of KSRelief and the Kuwaiti Red Crescent, express the same depoliticised focus on needs:

'We support Syrian refugees because we want a society where everyone is free from suffering. We want to address the issue of poverty with education, food, with an inclusive   approach.'[529]

'If local organisations are close to us, we want to work with them. If they are far away from our values… Our goal is to support the poor and the needy. Anybody that has a political affiliation, we don't want to work with them. For example, any organisation or local partner organisation who is affiliated to a political party, we don't want that. We are not here to support a political agenda.'[530]

These discourses reflect the paradigm shift documented by Fassin (2010: 463) through which, in recent decades, 'contemporary moral economies have been constituted around a new relationship to suffering, that has made it a central element of our public life' and even 'in the political arena […] an effective justification for action'. Previously perceived through the prism of political persecution, refugees are now seen through that of physical and mental suffering.

---

[527] Interview with representatives of the Rahma Centre for Community Services, Saida, January 2020.
[528] Interview with a representative of URDA, Beirut, November 2019 ; website.
[529] Skype interview with a representative of KSRelief, February 2020
[530] Interview with a representative of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent, January 2020.

Despite justice being a core value of Islamic humanitarianism, the exposure of pain takes over the demand for justice, and Syrian refugees are perceived as humanitarian subjects deprived of their political and social dimensions. As for IOs, the effect of this 'focus on the contingent necessity to answer needs' is depoliticising, as that 'the less relevant political debates on the merits of their interventions become' (Louis & Maertens 2021).

In addition, one depoliticised legitimisation narrative that emerged from the fieldwork articulates moral compassion and religious or collective identity, and is visible in patterns of speech presenting Gulf support as the result of a moral necessity, in line with the religious duties of the Muslim community paying the Zakat or the Sadaqah or with Arab solidarity, while offering a counter-narrative to the idea that Gulf donorship is mainly politically motivated. The generosity of Muslim donors (be they institutional or private donors) was systematically invoked by my interlocutors to explain the level of Gulf support, with a rhetorical emphasis on emotions and sincerity. This was further entrenched by patterns of speech stressing sentiments of spontaneity, immediacy and urgency. The focus on Syrians (instead of Lebanese) was often phrased as 'deep concern for their communities.'[531] This compassionate rhetoric specific to humanitarian action is depoliticising, as the ethical and moral imperative of alleviating suffering is difficult to argue with. It falls in line with Fassin's 'humanitarian government' corresponding to the 'deployment of moral sentiments in contemporary politics' (ibid.: 1). For instance, the Director of a Tripoli-based Charity said that:

> 'At the beginning, they [Gulf donors] were looking for 'their people.' The Muslim community. I am a Sunni Muslim, so I send money to other Muslims. So I will fund Sunni organisations who cater to the needs of the Syrian community in Lebanon, but also of the Lebanese and the Palestinians.'[532]

Explaining that he has been struggling to leverage donors' support towards the host community, an employee of Islamic Relief said:

---

[531] Interview with a representative of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent, January 2020. Benthall (2006) has shown that Islamic charities may have special advantages when operating in a Muslim country, as they are 'able to not only attain high effectiveness when assessed against professional norms, but also in some circumstances to benefit from privileged access to such societies, at both the official and the grass-roots levels, on account of the immediate trust made possible by a shared religion'.

[532] Interview with the Director of a charity, Tripoli, November 2019.

'Our partners from the Gulf collect their money from the communities. And most of the communities are watching TV. Only bloodshed in Syria. Bombing in Idlib. So, they pick up the phone and say, I donate 1000 USD to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Our partners cannot say 'ok this 1000 is going to be split between Syrians and Lebanese' …'[533]

When they did not benefit from Gulf funds, interlocutors from Arab or Islamic organisations still articulated this rhetoric of confessional or Arab solidarity which, though indirectly, legitimises the idea of Gulf donorship. For instance, a representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent (based in Saida) expressed that:

'From the Arab league or Red Crescent societies, we only have support from the Qataris. Others, Emirates, Saudis, no. Once we had the Kuwaitis. And then they stopped. But now, only we have the Qataris, and their support is intermittent [...]. In the International Federation of the Red Cross we are one family. But at least we feel that who should be closer to us, it is our brothers, which are the Arab Red Crescents. But they are keeping themselves away from us. Europeans are closer to us and more supporting.'[534]

This quote, while criticising the lack of Gulf commitment towards the Palestinian Red Crescent, has the function of legitimising the very principle of Gulf support based on identity and Arab solidarity. It articulates this rhetoric of regret: Arab donors do not support them because of 'some political agenda' even though they *should* in the name of 'brotherhood.''[535]

In addition, Gulf-funded organisations display an inclusive approach against particularistic ones, by insisting on the fact that they support Sunni, Chia and Christian beneficiaries; and that they do not limit their support to Syrian refugees but also include the Palestinian and Lebanese populations. In addition, they highlight their cooperation with Christian NGOs such as World Vision or Christian religious authorities for aid distribution. Even when programmes did not target Sunni people, the religion of the beneficiaries would be emphasised. For instance, a representative of the UAE embassy insisted that, as the UAE is 'an open country' with 'multiple religion[s]', they cooperate with 'Christians, Maronite, Orthodox' representatives in Lebanon in aid distribution: 'We work with the pope, cardinal who represents the Christians, he is the

---

[533] Interview with a representative of Islamic Relief, Beirut, January 2020.
[534] Interview with a representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent, Saida, January 2020.
[535] Interview with a representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent, Saida, January 2020.

head of the Maronite church, and also Audi for the Orthodox, the Maronite, Audi, maybe 9 to 10. 90% Muslims, 10% other religions.' 'Dar al Fatwa work with Gulf countries but also OCHA, CARE, the Red Crescent…' In saying so, he gave a universalist worldview to his religious discourse. A representative from the Qatar Charity said that they organise food distribution along with priests to reach Christian areas. Likewise, URDA's website reads as follows:

> 'We commit to assisting and nurturing human beings regardless of age, race, gender, nationality, faith or political affiliation. Whether we intervene in disaster relief or sustainable development actions, we serve both underserved Lebanese citizens as well as Palestinian and Syrian refugee communities to the highest international, professional, and ethical standards.'[536]

Legitimisation by moral evaluation is further entrenched by patterns of speech drawing a line between the humanitarian realm and the political one, as if they were essentially different. For instance, a representative of the Islamic Medical Association said that 'I cannot talk about politics, I do humanitarian work.'[537] Likewise, when asked whether humanitarian aid manages to stay outside of politics, a representative of the UAE embassy replied that:

> 'You are asking me, my opinion? A human being is a human being. Whether he is Muslim, Christian, Sunni, Chia, Druze, Buddhist, I don't know. You cannot see a child who is suffering and not help him. You should stand by every human being, and you should give them [...]. I am not a member of any political party.'[538]

A religious authority in Baalbeck who receives Gulf funding for its programmes of food distribution for Syrian refugees insisted that:

> 'Gulf countries don't send us money for geopolitical or political aims. Otherwise, they would send to political parties. What they do is that they tell their own people from the

---

[536] Source: URDA's website.
[537] Interview with the Director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[538] Interview with a representative of the UAE embassy, January 2020.

Gulf to go to the camps and give directly to the people, during holidays. They come for Christmas, for Eid, etc.'[539]

Therefore, this religious humanitarianism has displaced the secular logic of the 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin 2010), this 'new moral economy' based on human suffering (7): instead of being embedded in the language of universalism, it is in a narrative of religious humanitarianism and moral compassion. This study gives the opportunity to explore religious narratives in humanitarianism, which, 'whilst at the margins of international humanitarianism and academic accounts of its operation, are at the core of the experience of the vast majority of communities facing crisis and, perhaps as crucially, of the majority of national humanitarian agency staff'(Ager & Ager 2011: 465).

These patterns of speech draw on the category of cognitive legitimacy as they invoke specific moral values, principles or qualities – such as generosity or religious duties – which are not made explicit or debatable, but which trigger moral concepts or abstractions such as compassion, moral sense, etc.; and on the category of 'normative legitimacy' as it refers to religious and moral societal values. The implicit claim behind such statements is that humanitarian assistance remains first and foremost a moral action, falling within the literature on foreign aid 'as a moral practice' (Hattori 2003: 231) which looks at ethical justifications and empirical evidence of humanitarian rationales behind foreign aid. This supports Lumsdaine's (1993) idea that 'foreign aid cannot be explained on the basis of the economic and political interests of the donor countries; any satisfactory explanation must give a central place to the influence of humanitarian and egalitarian convictions upon aid donors' (29, cited in Hattori 2003: 231). This research confirms Hattori (*ibid*.)'s theory that, in the search for empirical substance to the claim of foreign aid as a moral practice [...] discursive claims are an important clue' (231): the moral dimension of foreign aid partly resides in this 'discursive side of a social practice, or, more simply, an aspect of what people say about what they do' (203).

*

Thus, if with Gulf-promoted humanitarianism authority is drawn from morality and religion rather than neutral expertise (as compared to UN actors), Gulf-promoted humanitarianism also

---

[539] Interview with a Sunni religious authority, Baalbeck, January 2020.

produces depoliticised refugee governance. Indeed, its embeddedness in religious values is depoliticising as it presents Gulf support as the result of a moral necessity; it appeals to moral concepts or abstractions such as compassion and moral sense that are not made contestable or even debatable. This falls in line with Carpi (2020)'s findings that Arab Gulf-funded NGOs present 'different shades of operational neutrality' [and] 'present their intentions for providing aid as unconditionally humane': in the end, 'by diplomatically complying with either apolitical or political humanitarianism, secular and faith-based NGOs in northern Lebanon still mobilise their morality as a way in which to either counter or support the political agendas of other (in)formal actors' (423).

IV. Legitimisation through pragmatic legitimacy: professional authority and identity

After pointing to the legitimacy drawn from religious humanitarianism and moral evaluation, I now turn to 'pragmatic legitimacy', i.e. discourses appraising the concrete efficiency of Gulf-funded organisations. Chapter two showed that the legitimisation of the UNHCR and Western organisations is made possible by the assertion of their professional and so-called universal expertise to answer refugees' needs, and chapter four concluded that local NGOs have no choice but to be co-opted in this depoliticised governance system. In a humanitarian field crossed by structural inequalities, there is a prevalent idea that to be accepted at the humanitarian table, actors from the South including Arab donors have to mirror the behaviour of their Northern counterparts, adopting their language as well as their *modus operandi* (Donini 2010; see, also Escobar 1991; Rist 1996). Grillo (1997: 12, *cited in* Lister 2003: 118) reminds us of the key role of discourses of development in granting legitimacy to aid actors: 'a discourse identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practising development as well as speaking and thinking about it'. By this logic, an organisation is deemed legitimate when its work and behaviour conform to dominant discourses in development.

We can therefore assess whether the legitimisation of Gulf donorship necessarily entails its integration within UN structures and Western forms of depoliticised governmentality, or whether it involves asserting the Gulf model with its own criteria of professionalism and

efficiency. To answer this question, this last section examines the discursive legitimisation of Gulf 'professionalism'.

A) Legitimisation of their own model of refugee governance

First, I show that for Gulf donors, the recourse to a politicised ethos is a means to capitalise on pre-existing repertoires of interventions in order to access the field without integrating within the UN structures. Indeed, one discursive repertoire that I identified during the research emphasises Gulf donors' operational efficiency and in particular their model of aid distribution, with its *ad hoc*, emergency approach (however prone to politicisation). Organisations funded by Gulf donors praised the fact that Gulf countries rely on much more informal and personal systems of transaction. This draws a peculiar *ad hoc* governance system, with closer relations between foreign donors and field actors: according to the director of the Islamic Medical Association, the Saudi ambassador comes in person to check the projects.[540] Likewise, the director of a Tripoli-based NGO mentioned that 'every month, Gulf donors send a team. Without any notice. [...] Not from the embassy, people come from the country, from Qatar, from Emirates. They come overnight, '*khalas*', we are in Lebanon, we want to go to field'[541] (while 'EU donors send a month notice'). These *ad hoc,* contingent governance practices, with closer but intermittent relations between foreign donors and field actors were systematically praised as more effective than the UN's lengthy bureaucratic restrictions, as they adapt quickly to the needs in the field:[542]

> The Gulf donors, they are not like the UN or EU donors. They have their own structures, their own approach, their own ways of intervening and everything is more efficient with them. We just have to submit concept notes, the project, the cost, the beneficiaries, all the data, and if they like it, we get the approval immediately.'[543]

[540] Interview with the Director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[541] Interview with the Director of Thiqah charity, Tripoli, November 2019.
[542] Interview with a representative of URDA, November 2019; interview with a representative of Banin, October 2021; Interview with a representative of URDA, December 2019; interview with a municipal advisor, Bab al Tabbeneh, Tripoli, January 2020.
Interview with the Director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.
[543] Interview with a municipal advisor, Bab al Tabbeneh, Tripoli, January 2020.

'Whenever we need something, we call the Kuwaiti, and we get the money within a week if they agree to our needs. It is all about marketing our needs here in Saida. We market them to the Kuwaiti: cash, in-kind, food parcels, anything. We have a relation of trust with our Kuwait donors.'[544]

'It's easier to work with Qatar Charity and KSRelief than the UNHCR, because the work with UNHCR is too administrative, too much bureaucracy. Gulf countries are more inclined to follow our approach: we are more interested in being with the people on the field. Our manager goes to their delegation and give them our proposal, then we interact by email, then they come, and if it's doable we get the funds immediately.'[545]

A mufti from the Beqaa, who manages a Gulf-funded school for Syrian children as well as food distributions for Syrian refugees, told me that:

'We received a lot of money here in Baalbeck and in-kind donations from Saudi Arabia. Their aid is neutral, they come on the grounds, the team sees what is happening, they give the donations, and they leave. While when it's the UN, a lot of people come, they make an assessment, but in the end, we get little money. And if they do give money, they come back often to check the project.'[546]

In addition, in interactions Gulf donors were identified with the symbol of the 'local', which enhanced their own legitimacy (Lister 2003: 182). Indeed, they were praised by their partners for respecting their own historically developed patterns of work, and this narrative often translated into (deprecatory) comparisons with the work of European donors or UN agencies. For instance, the UNHCR was criticised for 'implementing their own goals in Lebanon. Most of the time, they are not responding to the needs of the community',[547] while 'international organisations [were] obsessed with data and their own standards' without thinking about 'the meaning of the projects'. Describing how Kuwaiti donors have fixed the electrical wires in the alleys of the Palestinian camp of Bourj el-Barajneh, a humanitarian worker contrasted the

---

[544] Interview with a representative of the Rahma Centre for Community Services, Saida, January 2020.
[545] Source: interview with a representative of URDA, Beirut, October 2021.
[546] Interview with a Sunni religious authority, Baalbeck, January 2020.
[547] Interview with a representative of Dar el Fatwa, January 2020.

concrete efficiency of Gulf support to that of Europeans who are more interested in 'their own criteria, such as children['s] rights'.[548]

Likewise, an employee from the Islamic Medical Association said that while Gulf donors focus on first-aid emergencies and needs assessment, Western projects are informed by 'European criteria' (such as 'children's and women's rights').[549] This reputation is echoed in part of the literature, indicating that Gulf aid does better with regards to local ownership because of its strong reliance on local implementing partners (Turner 2019). However, recent development studies literature has warned against the tendency to essentialise and romanticise 'the local' (Mohan & Stokke 2000: 249): 'while a notion of the local remains centrally important to the legitimacy of NGOs it is frustratingly illusive' as it is a form of reification.

B) Depoliticisation: technocratisation, institutionalisation and integration within the UN system

In Lebanon, there is indication that Gulf donors have also increased their legitimacy by conforming themselves to Western standards of operation in their Syrian response. We mentioned earlier that in response to allegations of financing terrorism, Gulf states have increased governmental control over their humanitarian sector, with laws and restrictions on the flow of private donations, and firm action in closing charities that had proven not to follow regulations set by governments. To protect themselves from criticism, Gulf donors have recurred to depoliticisation tactics so as to send good signs to the international community through the setting up of regulations to prevent embezzlement, compulsory for institutions wishing to operate in Lebanon, and the channelling of their funds in a more transparent manner.

As a result, during the fieldwork, Gulf donors were praised by my interlocutors for making the efforts to – at least partially – integrate within multilateral structures. Due to the blacklisting of some of their aid organisations during the first years of the 'Syrian crisis', Qatar authorities have limited their operations in Lebanon to their Red Crescent Society and the Qatar Charity. In Lebanon, Saudi Arabia used to channel aid through a plethora of funds, but from 2015 on,

---

[548] Interview with a representative of Islamic Relief, Beirut, January 2020
[549] For instance, interview with the director of the Islamic Medical Association, Tripoli, January 2020.

decided to centralise most of its operations through KSRelief. Representatives of Muslim charities, KSRelief and the UAE embassy mentioned that before 2015, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were relying on an informal network of small charities for project implementation; but since 2015 they have started to go through more official actors such as Dar al Fatwa, and to cooperate with official ministers and municipalities, to make it easier to track funds.

From 2019 on the UAE has applied a wider definition of aid for recording and reporting purposes, to address issues associated with lack of transparency in funds from charities and private sources with religious and cultural motivations such as Zaqat and Sadaqah (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation 2019: 17; cited in Gökalp 2022: 4). In addition, their contribution to the budget of UN agencies has increased. The Qatar Charity and the UNHCR have an operational agreement (including to provide cash assistance to Syrian refugees), as well as KSRelief and the UNICEF.

In their self-presentation, Gulf donors insist on this path towards institutionalisation and their cooperation with UN agencies, as part of a strategy of 'legitimacy through association' underscoring state commitment to multilateral cooperation and partnerships. For instance, an attaché from the Emirati embassy started its briefing with the fact that:

> 'Now, all our funds for Syrian refugees are trackable. The UAE is part of the DAC. We are very cautious. We want to meet the donor standards. And we work with UN agencies, at home, here in Lebanon, everywhere. We work with the UNHCR, the UNRWA, because these are the most important institutions for the refugee response.'[550]

Likewise, the online self-presentation of the Kuwaiti Rahma International Society, which has leveraged its support for charities and hospitals in Lebanon with the Syrian 'crisis', epitomises the nexus between the culture of development and that of Islamic aid:

> 'The Rahma International Society offers its services to the needy inside and outside the State of Kuwait through developmental, educational and health projects intended to boost human life in addition to orphan, poor and humble families and providing urgent relief for the needy […] The most notable aspect of Rahma International Association is

---

[550] Interview with an attaché from the UAE Embassy, Beirut, January 2020.

obtaining ISO 9001:2015 and being the first philanthropic institution in transparency in the Arab world as per Forbes magazine classification as well as winning 16 national and international awards […] The Association has cooperation partnerships and agreements with a number of humanitarian and philanthropic institutions inside and outside Kuwait including but not limited to UNHCR, ICRC, Islamic development Bank.'[551]

Some members of the international Western community have also praised their Gulf partners for this evolution. For instance, GIZ has increased its cooperation with Gulf states in refugee-hosting countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. According to one of its representatives, the Gulf strategy of 'neutralisation' of their aid sector has proved successful, and is part of 'a narrative they want to sell':

'They want to show their reliability for international partners. It's part of their charming offensive to show the world that they are trusting partners. They participate in the DAC, they deliver their audit, aid statistics … The problem is that the DAC does not include the Zakat, because if it was, they would have an even higher share of ODA per GDP. This is part of the narrative they want to sell: to present themselves as 'good states', and this is not only cosmetic. They want to be treated with respect at higher levels. They don't want to be considered as 'another donor': they are like, 'we are more. We have expertise, access, presence on the ground. See us as partner and not as donors'.[552]

A general consensus frames Kuwait as the most 'legitimate' actor as it is the most active contributor to the UN response to the Syrian 'crisis': it is perceived as a 'apolitical and pragmatic regional power',[553] a 'neutral actor',[554] a 'reliable partner' with great 'predictability',[555] which conducts a 'pragmatic and non-ideological foreign policy'.[556] It has also significantly improved its reputation as a humanitarian actor with the organisation of three international pledging conferences for Syria. However, it stands as an exception: my interactions proved that there is still a long way to go before Gulf States are perceived as neutral and reliable humanitarian partners for traditional donors.

---

[551] Rahma International Society's website.
[552] Skype interview with a representative of GIZ, February 2020
[553] Interview with a representative of a European aid agency, February 2020.
[554] Interview with the director of Thiqah charity, Tripoli, November 2019.
[555] Skype interview with a representative of GIZ, February 2020
[556] Interview with a representative of a European aid agency, February 2020.

These depoliticisation strategies have proved more efficient towards their local partners, among whom they elicited greater appreciation. This translated during the fieldwork into the recurrence of legitimising patterns of speech praising their professionalism, strict monitoring, transparency and compliance with international norms. A representative of a Tripoli-based charity described this evolution towards more institutionalisation:

> 'Before, the Kuwaitis used to come with bags of money and just leave them at the airport for distribution [...]. Now, you have to be registered with the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Kuwait, through the embassy. They come here and check that you are clean, that your processes are clean and once you are registered with them then they will allow donors from Kuwait to operate through the official channel. But before, a long time ago, they were coming with bags .... No control .... Now, there is a lot of control'. [557]

Likewise, a representative of Union of Relief and Development Associations (URDA) said that 'now, the Qataris are applying all the international and UN standards'.[558] An NGO worker praised Gulf donors' newly gained 'professionalism':

> 'After three or four years dealing with them, Gulf donors are coming to a point of professionalism .... They started to do inspections, they want more proof, how are you working, collecting materials, if it's meeting the standards .... Those things weren't there before! Everything is digitalised now. They are coming [off] as way more professional and honestly, in terms of transparency, we love working like that. Thiqah has high trust in Gulf countries. And we are in their top list. It is really transparent for them who is delivering, who is not delivering .... So, they are sure that Thiqah is really following procedures. We have our rules and the money coming [in] is going where it should'.[559]

Gulf states are thus legitimised by reference to 'regulatory legitimacy' (Lister 2003) i.e. legitimacy dependent on the impersonal authority of rules and regulations established by international bodies such as the UN or OECD. The concept of 'cognitive legitimacy' is also

---

[557] Interview with the Director of Tripoli-based charity, Tripoli, November 2019.
[558] Interview with a representative of URDA, December 2019.
[559] Interview with the Director of Thiqah charity, Tripoli, November 2019.

relevant (Lister *ibid.*) as this legitimisation relies on the taken-for-granted idea that Western humanitarianism has more value.

The same emphasis on respecting international standards of transparency, formality and independency can be observed with charities receiving Gulf funds: in conversations, they insisted on their independence, legality and lack of political agenda, and on their respect for the 'highest of international professional standards' to become 'role model in sustainable humanitarian actions'.[560] As further evidence of their newly gained credibility for Western donors, is the fact that a number of them became successful in securing financial support from major international agencies with the Syrian 'crisis'.

However, this compliance with depoliticisation processes has also been criticised as adding burdensome bureaucratic procedures to formerly efficient modes of operation. In addition, the UAE and Saudi Arabia's new propensity to cooperate with Lebanese authorities for aid delivery was also the object of criticism due to rampant political corruption. The following quotes capture this criticism:

> 'Now, Saudi Arabia and the UAE want everyone to know that they are going with the official side, that they act like European states. They want to show that they work with official ministers, UN agencies, the municipalities, and not with charities. They took the decision with Dar al Fatwa to cooperate with the MoSA and the MoH. It started at the end of 2015. They did this because they wanted to be cleared out of accusations of funding terrorism through NGOs. They said: 'if you are dealing with officials, it is more secure'. But officials are stealing the money!'[561]

> 'The approach is different now. They are trying to apply all the international UN standards, partners, following-up procedures. They do need assessments, monitoring, project evaluation, following the UN standards. It's not always efficient, because for emergency, to bring something quickly, you need flexibility. But they are still more flexible than the EU. Hopefully, with Kuwait, it is still easy: give us the concept paper,

---

[560] Source: URDA's website, https://urda-lb.org/en/about-us/#vision.
[561] Interview with a representative of URDA, Saida, October 2021.

we approve, it can start. But now, with Qatar or the Emirati, you need assessments, monitoring, evaluation, all the UN standards … It is very slow!'[562]

'We stopped receiving funds from Saudi Arabia and the Emirati because they stopped funding NGOs as easily as before. Qatar and Kuwait still have the same mentality, with the concept note, approval, one person travels to follow-up, etc. But if you want to work with Qatar you need to be registered in Qatar, there is a commission with the government. Only very few NGOs in Lebanon now have these approval. This is limiting.'[563]

These quotes capture the contingency and arbitrary aspect of the criteria imposed by Western states, thereby challenging their so-called 'universal' nature.

*

This section has shown that the politicised ethos of Gulf-promoted humanitarianism is praised by local actors for its efficiency and has allowed Gulf donors to gain legitimacy and authority. Indeed, their lack of 'technocratic distancing' has allowed them to develop another field approach which respects their partners' own historically developed patterns of work. However, to protect themselves from criticism, Gulf donors have also recurred to depoliticisation tactics so as to send good signs to the international community. They have increased their legitimacy by conforming themselves to depoliticised governance structures without fully integrating the UN system. This section has therefore partially given credit to the prevalent idea that in order to be accepted at the humanitarian table, actors from the South including Arab donors have to mirror the behaviour of their Northern counterparts, adopt their language as well as their behaviour (Donini 2010).

---

[562] Interview with a representative of URDA, Beirut, November 2019.
[563] Interview with a representative of Al Fares, Halba, January 2020.

Conclusion:

This chapter has shed light on the growing role of Gulf states in shaping the global refugee regime. It offers an account of the complex on-the-ground social dynamics building the legitimacy of Gulf aid in response to Syrian refugee arrivals in Lebanon, by deconstructing the widespread narrative that Gulf donorship is purely politically motivated. Indeed, the way humanitarianism presents itself and the motives underpinning its actions is decisive in its ability to influence or shape positive attitudes.

This chapter highlights the role of non-depoliticised governance modes, placing fragility and contingency at the centre of the narrative, how they build legitimacy and authority, and shape refugee governance in the same capacity as depoliticised practices. Local actors' discursive practices play an active role in their social co-construction as 'politicised actors': NGOs and institutions benefitting from Gulf funds participate in conveying the vision of Gulf humanitarian donorship as resulting from Gulf States' political choices and calculation. These findings challenge the theoretical assumption that international actors are obliged to perform depoliticisation when they are involved in humanitarian or refugee policies: for Gulf donors, the recourse to a politicised ethos is a means to capitalise on pre-existing repertoires of interventions in order to access the field and legitimise their interventions without integrating within the UN structures.

In addition, this chapter has highlighted the existence of alternative processes (than technocratic depoliticisation) to build the legitimacy of international entities to play a role in refugee governance. First, a narrative of humanitarianism embedded in religious values presents Gulf support as the result of a moral necessary in line with the religious duties of the Muslim community. Second, the politicised ethos of Gulf-promoted humanitarianism is praised by local actors for its efficiency and respect of local partners' own historically developed patterns of work. However, to protect themselves from criticism, Gulf donors have recurred to depoliticisation tactics so as to send good signs to the international community.

Thus, this study provides an empirical grounding to the hypothesis that both politicised and depoliticised processes are fragile mechanisms, which shows the diffuse, relational and multiple nature of power and narratives. Legitimacy is also dynamic and may increase or decrease over

time as normative and cognitive views of development change: further research could investigate whether the burgeoning recognition of practices such as Zakat by the international development community already has had positive effects on the perceived legitimacy of Gulf donorship.[564]

---

[564] Recognition of the practical potential of Zakat as a resource for relief and development aid recently gathered momentum in during the Global Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. Cf. the title of an article published in the International Review of the Red Cross in 2011 (Binder & Meier 2011): 'Opportunity knocks: why non-Western donors enter humanitarianism and how to make the best of it'.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the depoliticisation of international interventions in the framework of the Syrian 'crisis' in Lebanon. Rather than studying depoliticisation and repoliticisation as isolated phenomenon, it has highlighted the constant 'coming and going' between depoliticisation and repoliticisation.

This research confirmed the hypothesis that depoliticisation is a key modality of foreign interventions concerning Syrian refugees in Lebanon, structuring their discursive space and leading to the legitimisation of their existence. This depoliticisation is deeply rooted in the hegemony of the 'weakness paradigm' to describe the Lebanese state by academics and IO professionals. This paradigm relies on a set of simplistic assumptions that 'pathologise' the state by framing it as absent, afflicted by fragmentation and bad governance, and that technicise it by framing its policy choices as an absence of choice, thus downplaying its political agency. I however draw on recent scholarly works to show the 'presence' of the state, and its political repertoire through strategies of hybridity and neo-patrimonial and rentier behaviour. Thus, I have taken the representation of a country incapable of governing itself as an object of investigation: indeed, such perception of Lebanon has determined the modus operandi of foreign interventions and provides crucial arguments for their legitimisation.

Depoliticisation tactics are perceptible through both the 'humanitarian apparatus' of the UNHCR (chapter two) and that of border management led by the ICMPD (chapter three). I have shed light on the problematisation of Lebanon's refugee and border governance by these foreign actors through a process of securitisation and the deployment of a paradigm of migration management, and their effects on Syrian mobility. For both the UNHCR and the ICMPD (and their operational partners), depoliticisation goes through the establishment of a continuum of signifiers and political labels centred around narratives of state absence, fragmentation, and a country perpetually in crisis. Then, they have promoted their role as neutral facilitators who enabled to bring all the participants to the table and thus overcomes sectarian divides; but also as brokers of neutral knowledge and depoliticised expertise.

The UNHCR's logics of action are embedded within technocratic distancing, its neutrality claims and vulnerability politics. These have permeated UNHCR policies related to Syrian

mobility, in particular refugee registration and deregistration and resettlement programmes, processes largely informed by filtering and exclusionary mechanisms. Finally, the UNHCR has adopted a depoliticised approach to return, embedded in a sedentary order which essentialises the link between Syrians and their country of origin.

Meanwhile, the ICMPD technicises Lebanon's border assemblage by framing it as a symptom of state weakness and lack of sovereignty, and not as the result of historical cross-border circulations. This technical interpretation is a form of depoliticisation since it fixes issues in a context of technical deficiencies and regulations while avoiding putting them into politics. The fact that the ICMPD supports a state-driven model makes this diagnosis of state weakness all the more crucial for the legitimatisation of its interventions: the ICMPD needs a state to act upon. However, the paradigm of migration management has been accepted and even instrumentalised by Lebanese state officials: the distinction between refugee and migrants and the sedentary bias have ultimately helped them discursively legitimise their policies of increased control. The Lebanese authorities' overt securitisation of Syrian mobility comes in contradiction with the paradigm of migration management. This research thus opens up new ways to analyse power dynamics between migration IOs and Southern recipients of funds, by showing how the former come to support the personal agenda of the latter in contradiction with a mere top-down approach.

The fourth chapter has provided empirical ground to the idea of the 'resilience' of politics in contexts of depoliticisation. It has assessed the disruptive and practical effects of repoliticisation on this governance system, beyond the circulation of discourses, in terms of power balance and leverage as regards the Lebanese government and civil society actors. Through the stigmatisation of Western interests, local actors call into question the legitimacy of the global socio-economic and political context underlying refugee governance and the power relations and structural inequalities underpinning it. Repoliticisation has revealed and given power and agency to the Lebanese government, who has been increasingly successful in negotiating financial aid, training, and equipment from the international community. Thus, this chapter adds to the literature re-thinking the nature of Lebanese statehood and challenging the 'weak state' perspective, as well as traditional views of North-South power dynamics. Given the elaborate mechanisms, formal and informal, that the government has used to influence UN policies and programs, the existing literature depicting the Lebanese government as weak presents an inaccurate description.

Thus, both depoliticisation and repoliticisation tactics shed light on the role of ideas, discourses and narratives to vest refugee governance with meaning as well as to contest those meanings, and play a critical role in forging, disrupting or negotiating the relations critical to this governance. This gives empirical validity to the dialectic and fluidity between depoliticisation and repoliticisation: if the Lebanese authorities and NGOs repoliticise certain aspects of the actions of Western donors and the UNHCR, they also accept or even take advantage of depoliticisation processes.

The role of Gulf donors and organisations in shaping the global refugee regime is growing but often forgotten. Their example challenges the theoretical assumption that international actors are obliged to perform depoliticisation when they are involved in humanitarian or refugee policies: for Gulf donors, the recourse to a politicised ethos is a means to capitalise on pre-existing repertoires of interventions and religious humanitarianism in order to access the field and legitimise their interventions without integrating within the UN structures.

Future trends in refugee governance might focus on the maritime border with Cyprus: from 2020 onwards, externalisation logics and rationales have crystallised attention on this 225 km maritime border as with the economic crisis, fears of migrant arrivals from Lebanon to Europe by sea have transformed it from a relatively neglected area to a priority one, triggering a *momentum* for international interventions in favour of an integrated maritime strategy. The crisis, border restrictions brought about by the global pandemic, and lack of foreseeable alternative in Syria have elicited boat departures, in particular from the Tripoli coastline, which have gained international attention:[565] in the year 2021 alone, the UNHCR estimates that at least 1,570 individuals have embarked or tried to embark on illicit sea journeys from Lebanon. The year 2022 was particularly deathly: in May 2022 one smuggling boat capsized off Lebanon's coast with 84 passengers.[566] In September 2022, 94 asylum seekers died in shipwreck off

---

565 In 2019 alone, more than 450 people arrived in Cyprus. A surge in the number of boats leaving Lebanon to Cyprus was reported between August and December 2018: 11 of the 21 boats arriving in Cyprus came from Lebanon. Source: Country Report, Cyprus, Asylum Data Base Information, available at: https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/AIDA_CY_2021update.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
566 Al Jazeera, 'Six dead, 48 rescued as migrant boat capsizes off Lebanon', 24 April 2022, available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/23/migrant-boat-capsizes-off-tripoli-lebanon [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Syria.[567] On December 31st, 2022, 232 migrants were rescued from a shipwreck and two died after the boat they were travelling in capsized off the coast of Lebanon.[568] Search and Rescue operations at sea have been carried out by the naval vessels of the Lebanese Army, with assistance from the UNIFIL. The EU solicited a stronger maritime strategy component within the phase 3 of the IBM project running from 2020 to 2023. On 22 August 2021, the ICMPD signed a partnership agreement with the World Maritime University and the International maritime Academy in Jounieh to support the development of the Integrated Maritime Strategy of Lebanon and, in November 2021, an inter-ministerial meeting took place bringing together all the stakeholders, including ministries and the BCC, for the drafting of a common strategy, still impending. Meanwhile, FRONTEX has become increasingly involved in capacity-building for border surveillance, carrying out visits in Lebanon while Lebanese authorities visited Frontex headquarters in Warsaw. In this context, Cypriot authorities have been trying to make the 2002 repatriation agreement effective – however, this agreement leaves the case of Syrians unattended, as Lebanon has not ratified the implementing protocol containing a third country national clause. With these arrivals, Cyprus has managed to trigger international support, with the signature of a MoU in February 2022 with the European Commission to manage irregular migration. In 2021, Cyprus carried out 104 return operations with FRONTEX assistance; and cases of illegal pushbacks to Lebanon have been brought to the European Court of Human Rights.

---

567 See: Al Jazeera, 'Two refugees die, 232 rescued after boat capsizes off Lebanon' https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/24/death-toll-from-lebanon-migrant-shipwreck-rises-to-89 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].
568 See: 'Al Jazeera, Death toll from Lebanon asylum seeker boat tragedy rises to 94', 24 September 2022, available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/1/two-refugees-die-232-rescued-after-boat-capsizes-off-lebanon [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abboud, S., Dahi, O. S., Hazbun, W., Grove, N. S., Pison Hindawi, C., Mouawad, J., & Hermez, S. (2018). Towards a Beirut School of critical security studies. *Critical Studies on Security*, *6*(3), 273-295.

Abi Yaghi, M.-N., Yammine, L., & Jagarnathsingh, A. (2019). Civil Society in Lebanon: The Implementation Trap. *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.28943/CSKC.002.70000

Abrahamsen, R., & Williams, M. C. (2009). Security beyond the state: Global security assemblages in international politics. *International political sociology*, *3*(1), 1-17.

Adamson, F. B., & Tsourapas, G. (2019). Migration diplomacy in world politics. *International Studies Perspectives*, *20*(2), 113-128.

Adler, E., & Pouliot, V. (2011). International practices. *International theory*, *3*(1), 1-36.

Agamben, G. (1998). 2. Biopolitics and the Right of Man. In *Homo Sacer* (p. 126-135). Stanford University Press.

Ager, A., & Ager, J. (2011). Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *24*(3), 456-472. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer030

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the undesirables*. Polity.

Akoka, K. (2020). *L'asile et l'exil: Une histoire de la distinction réfugiés/migrants*. La Découverte. https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.akoka.2020.01

Akram, S. (2014). *UNRWA and Palestinian refugees*. *Oxford: Oxford University Press*. (p. 227).

Al Husseini, J. (2007). *The Arab States and the Refugee Issue: A Retrospective View*. 435-463.

Al Yahya, K., & Fustier, N. (2011). Saudi Arabia as a humanitarian donor: High potential, little institutionalisation. *Little Institutionalization (March 17, 2011)*.

Alles, D., Guilbaud, A., & Lagrange, D. (2016). L'entretien en relations internationales. *Méthodes de recherche en relations internationales*, 159-176.

Allsopp, J. (2017). Agent, victim, soldier, son: Intersecting masculinities in the European 'refugee crisis'. In *A gendered approach to the Syrian refugee crisis* (p. 155-174). Routledge.

Al-Mezaini, K. S. (2012). *The UAE and foreign policy: Foreign aid, identities and interests*. Routledge.

Al-Mezaini, K. S. (2017). From identities to politics: UAE foreign aid. *South-South Cooperation Beyond the Myths: Rising Donors, New Aid Practices*, 225-244.

Anderson, M., & Bort, E. (2001). *The frontiers of the European Union*. Springer.

Andersson, R. (2022). *No go world: How fear is redrawing our maps and infecting our politics*. University of California Press.

Asad, T. (2015). Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism. *Critical Inquiry*, *41*(2), 390-427. https://doi.org/10.1086/679081

Ashutosh, I., & Mountz, A. (2011). Migration management for the benefit of whom? Interrogating the work of the International Organization for Migration. *Citizenship studies*, *15*(01), 21-38.

Atallah, S. (2016). Can municipalities take on the refugee crisis. *Beirut: Lebanese Center for Policy Studies*.

Atallah, S. (2018). *Addressing Citizens' Concerns is Not on the Parliament's Agenda*.

Atallah, S., & Mahdi, D. (2017). *'Law and Politics of 'Safe Zones' and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon," Beirut, Lebanon Centre for Policy Studies, available at: Https://www. Lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1515749841-lcps_report_-_online.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023]*.

Austin, J. L. (1962). Speech acts.

Bache, I., & Flinders, M. (2004). Multi-level governance and the study of the British state. *Public policy and administration*, *19*(1), 31-51.

Bakewell, O. (2002). Returning refugees or migrating villagers? Voluntary repatriation programmes in Africa reconsidered. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *21*(1/2), 42-73.

Balzacq, T. (2005). The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context. *European journal of international relations*, *11*(2), 171-201.

Balzacq, T. (2008). The policy tools of securitization: Information exchange, EU foreign and interior policies. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *46*(1), 75-100.

Barakat, S. (2019). *Priorities and Challenges of Qatar's Humanitarian Diplomacy. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Brief)*.

Barakat, S., & Zyck, S. A. (2010). *Gulf state assistance to conflict-affected environments*.

Barnett, M., & Duvall, R. (2005). Power in international politics. *International organization*, *59*(1), 39-75.

Barnett, M., & Finnemore, M. (2004). *Rules for the world: International organizations in global politics*. Cornell University Press.

Barth F, E. (1969). Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference. Waveland Press.

Basham, V. M., & Vaughan-Williams, N. (2013). Gender, race and border security practices: A profane reading of 'muscular liberalism'. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *15*(4), 509-527.

Baumann, H. (2012). The 'New Contractor Bourgeoisie' in Lebanese Politics: Hariri, Mikati and Fares. *Lebanon: After the Cedar Revolution*, 125-144.

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, *13*(4), 544-559.

Bayart, J.-F. (1996). *La greffe de l'État* (Vol. 2). KARTHALA Editions.

Bayart, J.-F. (2006). *L'Etat en Afrique: La politique du ventre*. Fayard.

Beaudonnet, L., & Mérand, F. (2019). Qu'est-ce que l'Europe politique ?: Un agenda de recherche sur la politisation. *Politique européenne*, *N° 64*(2), 6-30. https://doi.org/10.3917/poeu.064.0006

Beck, M. (2015). The end of regional Middle Eastern Exceptionalism? The Arab league and the gulf cooperation council after the Arab Uprisings. *Democracy and Security*, *11*(2), 190-207.

Becker, H. S. (1963). Labelling theory reconsidered 1. In P. Rock & M. Mclntosh, *Deviance and social control*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe: 41-66.

Bellion-Jourdan, J. (2006). les ONG islamiques sont-elles purement humanitaires ?: Réflexions sur une vraie fausse question. *Vacarme*, *34*(1), 183. https://doi.org/10.3917/vaca.034.0183

Bennafla, K. (2005). *La region de la Beqaa: Les mutations d'un espace-frontiere entre syrie et liban*. REM. *Revue de l'économie méridionale*, 53(209-210), 211-218.

Bennani-Chraïbi, M. (2010). Quand négocier l'ouverture du terrain c'est déjà enquêter. Obtenir la passation de questionnaires aux congressistes de partis marocains. *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, *17*(4), 93-108.

Benthall, J., & Bellion-Jourdan, J. (2003). Western versus Islamic aid? International Muslim charities and humanitarian aid in Sudan.

Benthall, J. (2016). Islamic charities and Islamic humanism in troubled times. In *Islamic charities and Islamic humanism in troubled times*. Manchester University Press.

Benthall, J., & Lacey, R. (2014). *Gulf Charities and Islamic philanthropy in the'Age of Terror'and beyond*. ISD LLC.

Berman, C., Clarke, K., & Majed, R. (2023). *Theorizing revolution in democracies: Evidence from the 2019 uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq*. World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER).

Betts, A. (2009). Institutional proliferation and the global refugee regime. *Perspectives on politics*, *7*(1), 53-58.

Betts, A. (2011a). *Global migration governance*. Oxford University Press.

Betts, A. (2011b). *Protection by persuasion: International cooperation in the refugee regime*. Cornell University Press.

Betts, A., & Loescher, G. (2011). *Refugees in international relations*. Oxford University Press.

Beveridge, R. (2017). The (Ontological) Politics in Depoliticisation Debates: Three Lenses on the Decline of the Political. *Political Studies Review*, *15*(4), 589-600. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929916664358

Bigo, D. (1994). The European Internal Security Field: Stakes and Rivalries in a Newly Developing Area of Police Intervention. In *Policing across national boundaries* (p. 161-173). Pinter publications.

Bigo, D. (1998). Sécurité et immigration: Vers une gouvernementalité par l'inquiétude? *Cultures & conflits*, *31-32*.

Bigo, D. (2002). Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease. *Alternatives*, *27*(1_suppl), 63-92.

Binder, A., & Meier, C. (2011). Opportunity knocks: Why non-Western donors enter humanitarianism and how to make the best of it. *International Review of the Red Cross*, *93*(884), 1135-1149.

Binder, A., Meier, C., & Steets, J. (2010). Humanitarian assistance: Truly universal. *Global Public Policy Institute*, *2*, 42.

Boswell, C. (2008). The political functions of expert knowledge: Knowledge and legitimation in European Union immigration policy. *Journal of European public policy*, *15*(4), 471-488.

Boswell, C. (2009). Knowledge, legitimation and the politics of risk: The functions of research in public debates on migration. *Political studies*, *57*(1), 165-186.

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La Distinction, critique sociale du jugement Minuit*.

Bourdieu, P. (2002). Against the policy of depoliticization. *Studies in Political Economy*, *69*(1), 31-41.

Briassoulis, H. (2019). Governance as multiplicity: The Assemblage Thinking perspective. *Policy Sciences*, *52*(3), 419-450. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-018-09345-9

Brooks, R. E. (2005). Failed states, or the state as failure? *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 1159-1196.

Buckner, E., Spencer, D., & Cha, J. (2018). Between policy and practice: The education of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *31*(4), 444-465.

Bueger, C. (2018). Territory, authority, expertise: Global governance and the counter-piracy assemblage. *European Journal of International Relations*, *24*(3), 614-637. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117725155

Buzan, B. (1993). *Identity, migration and the new security agenda in Europe*.

Buzan, B., Wæver, O. & De Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Call, C. T. (2008). The fallacy of the 'Failed State'. *Third world quarterly*, *29*(8), 1491-1507.

Cammett, M., Kruszewska-Eduardo, D., Parreira, C., & Atallah, S. (2022). Coethnicity Beyond Clientelism: Insights from an Experimental Study of Political Behavior in Lebanon. *Politics and Religion*, *15*(2), 417-438.

Cammett, M., Parreira, C., Kruszewska-Eduardo, D., & Atallah, S. (2022). Commitment to the 'National' in Post-Conflict Countries: Public and Private Security Provision in Lebanon. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *66*(7-8), 1235-1262. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027221079401

Caponio, T., & Jones-Correa, M. (2018). Theorising migration policy in multilevel states: The multilevel governance perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(12), 1995-2010.

Carbone, M. (2012). Beyond aid: Policy coherence and Europe's development policy. In *International development policy: Aid, emerging economies and global policies* (pp. 161-173). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Carmona, A. R. (2008). *El proyectorado: Bolivia tras 20 años de ayuda externa* (Vol. 16). Intermón Oxfam Editorial.

Carpenter, J. (2006). The gender of control. *Borders, mobility and technologies of control*, 167-177.

Carpenter, R. C. (2003). 'Women and children first': Gender, norms, and humanitarian evacuation in the Balkans 1991–95. *International Organization*, *57*(4), 661-694.

Carpi, E. (1969). Winking at Humanitarian Neutrality: The Liminal Politics of the State in Lebanon. *Anthropologica*, *61*(1), 83-96. https://doi.org/10.3138/anth.2018-0006

Carpi, E. (2020). Different shades of 'neutrality': Arab Gulf NGO responses to Syrian refugees in northern Lebanon. *Refuge in a Moving World: Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines*.

Carpi, E., Younes, M., & Abi-Yaghi, M.-N. (2016). *Crisis and control.(In) formal hybrid security in Lebanon*.

Carrera, S. (2008). *The EU border management strategy: FRONTEX and the challenges of irregular immigration in the Canary Islands* (No. 261). CEPS.

Cassarino, J.-P. (2005). *Migration and border management in the Euro-Mediterranean area: Heading towards new forms of interconnectedness*.

Cassarino, J.-P. (2018). Beyond the criminalisation of migration: A non-western perspective. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, *4*(4), 397-411.

Chalcraft, J. (2008). *The invisible cage: Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*. Stanford University Press.

Chatty, D., Mansour, N., & Yassin, N. (2013). *Statelessness and tribal identity on Lebanon's eastern borders*. *Mediterranean Politics*, 18(3), 411-426.

Chayes, A., & Chayes, A. H. (1993). On compliance. *International organization*, *47*(2), 175-205.

Chiha, M. (1962). Face and Presence of Lebanon. *Cénacle Libanais*.

Chimni, B. S. (2004). From resettlement to involuntary repatriation: Towards a critical history of durable solutions to refugee problems. *Refugee survey quarterly*, *23*(3), 55-73.

Choudry, A., & Kapoor, D. (2013). *NGOization: Complicity, contradictions and prospects*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Chouliaraki, L. (2010). Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity. *International journal of cultural studies*, *13*(2), 107-126.

Clark, C. R. (2007). Understanding vulnerability: From categories to experiences of young Congolese people in Uganda. *Children & society*, *21*(4), 284-296.

Clarke, M., & Tittensor, D. (2016). *Islam and development: Exploring the invisible aid economy*. Routledge.

Cole, A. (2016). All of us are vulnerable, but some are more vulnerable than others: The political ambiguity of vulnerability studies, an ambivalent critique. *Critical Horizons*, *17*(2), 260-277.

Connell, R. (1987). Gender and Power: Society, thePerson andSexual Politics. *London: Polity. Cooke, P.(1983)'Reviewof Gordonetal.(1982)', Environment and*.

Cooley, A., & Ron, J. (2002). The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action. *International Security*, *27*(1), 5-39. https://doi.org/10.1162/016228802320231217

Cornwall, A., & Eade, D. (2010). *Deconstructing development discourse: Buzzwords and fuzzwords*. Oxfam GB.

Cuttitta, P. (2016). Humanitarianism and migration in the Mediterranean borderscape: The Italian–North African border between sea patrols and integration measures. In *Borderscaping: Imaginations and practices of border making* (p. 131-140). Routledge.

Cuttitta, P. (2018). Repoliticization Through Search and Rescue? Humanitarian NGOs and Migration Management in the Central Mediterranean. *Geopolitics*, *23*(3), 632-660. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1344834

Dagher, A. (2022). Comment une élite prédatrice a détruit le Liban. *Lectures, Publications reçues*.

Dahl, R. A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioral science*, *2*(3), 201-215.

De Bel-Air, F. (2015). *A note on Syrian refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to assess data and policies*.

De Sardan, J.-P. O. (2008). State bureaucracy and governance in Francophone West Africa: An empirical diagnosis and historical perspective. In *The governance of daily life in Africa* (p. 39-71). Brill.

De Wilde, P., & Zürn, M. (2012). Can the politicization of European integration be reversed? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *50*, 137-153.

Deniz, G. (s. d.). *Recent trends in the international humanitarian regime and the rise of the UAE on world huma stage*.

Devin, G. (2017). *Resources and applied methods in international relations*. Springer.

Daher, J. (2016). Hezbollah: The Political Economy of Lebanon's Party of God. Pluto Press.

Dickinson, E. (s. d.). Playing with Fire: Why private Gulf financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home. *Brookings*.

Dietrich, R. C. (2017).

Dini, S. (2018). Migration management, capacity building and the sovereignty of an African State: International Organization for Migration in Djibouti. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(10), 1691-1705.

Dini, S. (2021). *Gouverner les migrations internationales par le don. Une ethnographie économique de l'intervention du Haut-Comissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés et de l'Organisation internationale pour les migrations à Djibouti (1977-2019)*.

Dini, S., & Giusa, C. (2020). *Externalising Migration Governance Through Civil Society*. Springer.

Dolezal, M., Grande, E., Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (2016). Exploring politicisation: Design and methods. *Politicising Europe: Integration and mass politics*, 32-60.

Donini, A. (2010). The far side: The meta functions of humanitarianism in a globalised world. *Disasters*, *34*, S220-S237. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.2010.01155.x

Donnan, H., & Wilson, T. M. (2021). *Borders: Frontiers of identity, nation and state*. Routledge.

Doraï, K. (2016). *Palestinian refugees and the current Syrian conflict: From settled refugees to stateless asylum seekers?. In Migration, Mobilities and the Arab Spring (pp. 158-173). Edward Elgar Publishing*.

Doraï, K., & Dahdah, A. (2021). *Camps vs. Self-settled refugees ? A comparative analysis of syrian refugees' Settlement in Jordan and Lebanon*.

Doraï, M. K. (2010). *Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Migration, mobility and the urbanization process*.

Düvell, F. (2012). Transit migration: A blurred and politicised concept: Transit Migration. *Population, Space and Place*, *18*(4), 415-427. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.631

El Ghaziri, N. (2010). *13 The politics of public-management reforms in post-war Lebanon*.

El Mufti, K. (2014). Official response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, the disastrous policy of no-policy. *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, *1*(1).

El Qadim, N. (2015). *Le gouvernement asymétrique des migrations: Maroc/Union européenne*. Dalloz.

Elkahlout, G. (2020). 'Hearts and Minds': Examining the Kuwaiti Humanitarian Model as an Emerging Arab Donor. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, *14*(1), 141-157. https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1728975

Escobar, A. (1991). Anthropology and the development encounter: The making and marketing of development anthropology. *American ethnologist*, *18*(4), 658-682.

Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World* (Vol. 1). Princeton University Press.

ESCWA. (2020). Poverty in Lebanon : Impact of Multiple Shocks and Call for Solidarity, available at: https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-

00268_pb15_beirut-explosion-rising-poverty-en.pdf; available at: <u>poverty in Lebanon : Impact of Multiple Shocks and Call for Solidarity</u> [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

ESCWA. (2021). Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon: A proposed measurement framework, and an assessment of the socioeconomic crisis. Available at: <u>https://www.unescwa.org/publications/multidimensional-poverty-lebanon</u> [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

European Union. (2019). 'Supporting Syria and the region: post-Brussels conference financial tracking, *Relief Web,* available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ syria-report-seven_0.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

European Union. (2020). 'Supporting Syria and the Region: Post-Brussels conference financial tracking', *Relief Web,* available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ syria-report-seven_0.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (2020). 'Fact Sheet,' Website, *European Commission,* available at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

European Commission (2015). '*Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy',* Website, *European Commission,* 18 November 2015, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=cel-ex:52015JC0050 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

European Commission. (2021). European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations. Fact Sheet. https://ec. europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en.

Eyben, R. (2015). *The gloss of harmony: The politics of policy-making in multilateral organisations, edited by Birgit Müller*. *25*(2), 189-190.

Facon, C. (2020). The Power-Interest Nexus in Responses to Syrian Refugee Arrivals in Lebanon: Tensions and Interactions between the State and the International Community. *Civil Society Review*. https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.004.006

Facon, C. (2022). Depoliticization and (re)politicization tactics in refugee governance in Lebanon: Comparing Western and Gulf donors' interventions. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.2011776

Facon, C. (2023). Gulf responses to Syrian refugee arrivals in Lebanon: Narratives of legitimisation. *Third World Quarterly*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2188187

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research. Psychology Press*.

Fakhoury, T. (2015). Lebanon's perilous balancing act. *Current History*, *114*(776), 349.

Fakhoury, T. (2017). Governance strategies and refugee response: Lebanon in the face of the Syrian displacement. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *49*(4), 681-700. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743817000654

Fakhoury, T. (2019). Multi-level governance and migration politics in the Arab world: The case of Syria's displacement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(8), 1310-1326.

Fakhoury, T. (2020). Refugee Governance in Crisis: The Case of the EU-Lebanon Compact. *Migration Governance and Asylum Crises*.

Fakhoury, T. (2021). Building Resilience in Strained Refugee-Hosting States ? The EU in The Face of Lebanon's Cumulative Crises. In *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in light of the United Nations Global Compact on Refugees: International Experiences on Containment and Mobility and their Impacts on Trust and Rights* (p. 144-156). European University Institute.

Fakhoury, T., & Stel, N. (2022). EU engagement with contested refugee returns in Lebanon: The aftermath of resilience. *Geopolitics*, 1-26.

Farah, F., & Maucourant, J. (2021). *Liban: Capitalisme, État et pouvoir en crise*.

Fassin, D. (2011). *Humanitarian reason: A moral history of the present*. University of California Press.

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99-115.

Fawaz, M., & Harb, M. (2020). Is Lebanon Becoming Another 'Republic of the NGOs'? *Research Papers, Arab Center Washington DC*.

Fawcett, P., Flinders, M. V., Hay, C., & Wood, M. (2017). *Anti-politics, depoliticization, and governance*. Oxford University Press.

Fawcett, P., & Marsh, D. (2014). Depoliticisation, governance and political participation. *Policy & Politics*, *42*(2), 171-188.

Fawcett, P., & Wood, M. (2017). Depoliticization, meta-governance, and coal seam gas regulation in New South Wales. *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*, 217-241.

Ferguson, J. (1994). *The anti-politics machine:' development,' depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. U of Minnesota Press.

Ferris, E. G. (2011). *The politics of protection: The limits of humanitarian action*. Brookings Institution Press.

Fine, S. (2016). *Bordering subjects, souls and states: An enquiry into' bordercratic' practices and rationalities in Turkey*.

Flinders, M., & Buller, J. (2006). Depoliticisation: Principles, tactics and tools. *British politics*, *1*, 293-318.

Flinders, M., & Buller, J. (2005). 'The Domestic Origins of Depoliticisation in the Area of British Economic Policy'. The British Journal of Politics & International Relations7(4): 526–43.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Vintage.

Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Springer.

Fregonese, S. (2012). Beyond the 'weak state': Hybrid sovereignties in Beirut. *Environment and planning D: society and space*, *30*(4), 655-674.

Frelick, B. (2012). Refugees worldwide: Regional issues. *Refugees worldwide: Global perspectives*, *1*, 267-297.

Fresia, M. (2009). Une élite transnationale: La fabrique d'une identité professionnelle chez les fonctionnaires du Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux Réfugiés. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, *25*(3), 167-190. https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.4999

Fresia, M. (2012). La fabrique des normes internationales sur la protection des réfugiés au sein du comité exécutif du HCR. *Critique internationale*, *n° 54*(1), 39. https://doi.org/10.3917/crii.054.0039

Fresia, M. (2013). The making of global consensus: Constructing norms on refugee protection at UNHCR. *The Gloss of Harmony: The Politics of Policy-Making in Multilateral Organisations*, 50-74.

Fresia, M. (2014). Building consensus within UNHCR's executive committee: Global refugee norms in the making. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *27*(4), 514-533.

Fresia, M., & Delville, P. L. (2018). *Au cœur des mondes de l'aide internationale: Regards et postures ethnographiques*. KARTHALA Editions.

Gardner, K., & Lewis, D. (2015). *Anthropology and development: Challenges for the twenty-first century*. Pluto Press.

Garelli, G., & Tazzioli, M. (2013). Challenging the discipline of migration: Militant research in migration studies, an introduction. *Postcolonial Studies*, *16*(3), 245-249.

Garnier, A., Jubilut, L. L., & Sandvik, K. B. (2018). *Refugee resettlement: Power, politics, and humanitarian governance* (Vol. 38). Berghahn Books.

Geha, C., & Talhouk, J. (2019). From Recipients of Aid to Shapers of Policies: Conceptualizing Government–United Nations Relations during the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *32*(4), 645-663. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey052

Geisser, V. (2013). The question of Syrian refugees in Lebanon: The awakening of the ghosts of the past. *Confluences Mediterranee*, *87*(4), 67-84.

Georgi, F. (2010). For the benefit of some: The international organization for migration and its global migration management. *The politics of international migration management*, 45-72.

Georgi, F. (2011). *Migrations management in Europa: Eine kritische Studie am Beispiel des International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)*.

Ghamroun, S. (2014). Effets d'état: Mobilisations et action publique au Liban à l'épreuve du pluralisme juridique. *Gouvernement & action publique*, *4*, 57-82.

Giddens, A. (1985). *The Nation-State and Violence*. University of California Press.

Glasman, J. (2017). Seeing like a refugee agency: A short history of UNHCR classifications in Central Africa (1961–2015). *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *30*(2), 337-362.

Godenau, D., Zapata Hernandez, V., Cuttitta, P., Triandafyllidou, A., Maroukis, T., & Pinyol, G. (2008). The case of the Italian southern sea borders: Cooperation across the Mediterranean? In *Documentos CIDOB Migraciones 17. Immigration flows and the management of the EU's southern maritime borders* (p. 45-62). Cidob Edicions.

Gökalp, D. (2020). The UAE's humanitarian diplomacy: Claiming state sovereignty, regional leverage and international recognition. *CMI Working Paper*.

Gökalp, D. (2022). *Recent trends in the international humanitarian regime and the rise of the UAE*.

Gramsci, A., Paris, R., Aymard, M., & Bouillot, F. (1998). *Cahiers de prison. Cahiers 1, 2, 3, 4 et 5*.

Griffin, L., & Ragin, C. C. (1994). Some observations on formal methods of qualitative analysis. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *23*(1), 4-21.

Grillo, R. D. (1997). Discourses of development: The view from anthropology. In *Discourses of development* (p. 1-33). Routledge.

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. A. (1997). Active interviewing. *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice, second edition. London: Sage*.

Guild, E. (2009). *Security and Migration in the 21st Century*. Polity.

Guild, E., & Bigo, D. (2010). The transformation of European border controls. In *Extraterritorial Immigration Control* (p. 252-273). Brill Nijhoff.

Gulrajani, N., & Swiss, L. (2019). Donor proliferation to what ends? New donor countries and the search for legitimacy. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement*, *40*(3), 348-368. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2019.1543652

Haas, E. B. (1980). Why collaborate ? Issue-linkage and international regimes. *World politics*, *32*(3), 357-405.

Haas, P. M. (1992). Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination. *International organization*, *46*(1), 1-35.

Habermas, J. (1990). *Discourse ethics: Notes on a program of philosophical justification. In Moral consciousness and communicative action (pp. 43–115). MIT Press.*

Habermas, J. (1990). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. MIT press.

Hall, N. (2015). Money or Mandate? Why International Organisations Engage with the Climate Change Regime. *Global Environmental Politics 15* (2): 79-97.

Hanafi, S. (2017). Gulf Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. *Sociology of Islam*, *5*(2-3), 112-137. https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00503005

Harb, M., & Atallah, S. (2015). *Local governments and public goods: Assessing decentralization in the Arab world,* The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Open Society Foundations, Beirut, Lebanon.

Hardin, R. (2006). *Trust* (Vol. 10). Polity.

Hasselbarth, S. (2014). *Islamic charities in the Syrian context in Jordan and Lebanon. Friedrichebert Stiftung.*

Hattori, T. (2003). The moral politics of foreign aid. *Review of international studies*, *29*(2), 229-247.

Hay, C. (2007). *Why we hate politics* (Vol. 5). Polity.

Hay, C. (2014). Depoliticisation as process, governance as practice: What did the 'first wave' get wrong and do we need a 'second wave' to put it right? *Policy & Politics*, *42*(2), 293-311. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557314X13959960668217

Hazbun, W. (2016). Assembling security in a 'weak state:'the contentious politics of plural governance in Lebanon since 2005. *Third World Quarterly*, *37*(6), 1053-1070.

Healy, C. (2016). How are the war in Syria and the refugee crisis affecting human trafficking?, *ICMPD Policy Brief.*

Healy, C. (2015). Targeting vulnerabilities: the impact of the Syrian War and Refugee Situation on Trafficking in Persons: a study of Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, *ICMPD report.*

Hermez, S. (2015). When the state is (n) ever present: On cynicism and political mobilization in Lebanon. *Journal of the royal anthropological institute*, *21*(3), 507-523.

Hibou, B., Bayart, J. F. & Ellis, S. (1997). Le Capital social de l'Etat falsificateur ou les ruses de l'intelligence économique. *La Criminalisation de l'Etat en Afrique. Complexe, Bruxelles*: 105-158.

Hilhorst, D., & Jansen, B. J. (2010). Humanitarian Space as Arena: A Perspective on the Everyday Politics of Aid: Humanitarian Space as Arena. *Development and Change*, *41*(6), 1117-1139. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01673.x

Hilhorst, D., Weijers, L., & van Wessel, M. (2012). Aid Relations and Aid Legitimacy: Mutual imaging of aid workers and recipients in Nepal. *Third World Quarterly*, *33*(8), 1439-1457. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.698126

Hitman, G. (2019). Gulf states' policy towards Syrian refugees: charity before hospitality. *Asian Affairs*, *50*(1), 80-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2019.1567103

Hollander, J. A., & Einwohner, R. L. (2004). *Conceptualizing resistance*. *19*, 533-554.

Hourani, N. B. (2013). Lebanon: Hybrid sovereignties and US foreign policy. *Middle East Policy*, *20*(1), 39-55.

Hudson, M. C. (1967). *A Case of Political Underdevelopment*. *The Journal of Politics, 29(4), 821-837*.

Hudson, M. C. (1968). *The precarious republic: Political modernization in Lebanon*.

Hutter, S., Grande, E., & Kriesi, H. (2016). *Politicising Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

Huysmans, J. (2000). The European Union and the securitization of migration. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *38*(5), 751-777.

Hybels, R. C. (1995). On legitimacy, legitimation, and organisations: a critical review and integrative theoretical model. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *1995*(1), 241-245. https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.1995.17536509

Hyndman, M. J. (1996). *Geographies of displacement: Gender, culture and power in UNHCR refugee camps, Kenya*.

Içduygu, A., & Nimer, M. (2020). The politics of return: Exploring the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, *41*(3), 415-433.

ICMPD (2013). Trafficking in human-beings in Lebanon: a stocktaking report, *ICMPD report*.

ICMPD (2021). 'Le Monde de l'Entre-Deux', *Conflict Analysis Study of the Border Areas of Akkar and Baalbek El-Hermel Governorates*.

Infantino, F. (2017). *Outsourcing border control: Politics and practice of contracted visa policy in Morocco*. Springer.

Jagarnathsingh, A. (2016). Syrian Refugees' Livelihoods. The Impact of Progressively Constrained Legislations and Increased Informality on Syrians' Daily Lives. *Lebanon Support Report Series*, 6-7.

Jagarnathsingh, A. (2019). Lebanon's Border Regime: Fluid Rigidity, Foreign Interference, and Hybrid Security Assemblages.

Janmyr, M. (2016). Precarity in exile: The legal status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *35*(4), 58-78.

Janmyr, M. (2017). No Country of asylum: 'Legitimising' Lebanon's rejection of the 1951 refugee convention. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, *29*(3), 438-465.

Janmyr, M. (2018). UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: Negotiating status and registration in Lebanon. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *22*(3), 393-419.

Janmyr, M., & Mourad, L. (2018). Modes of ordering: labelling, classification and categorization in Lebanon's refugee response. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *31*(4), 544-565.

Jenkins, L. (2011). The difference genealogy makes: Strategies for politicisation or how to extend capacities for autonomy. *Political studies*, *59*(1), 156-174.

Jessop, B. (2007). *State power*. Polity.

Jessop, B. (2014). Repoliticising depoliticisation: Theoretical preliminaries on some responses to the American fiscal and Eurozone debt crises. *Policy & Politics*, *42*(2), 207-223. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655864

Jessop, B. (2022). State theory. *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, 77-88.

Johnson, M. (1986). *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State 1840-1985* (Vol. 28). Ithaca Press.

Johnson, M. (2001). *All Honorable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon New York: The Centre for Lebanese Studies*.

Kagan, M. (2011). *We live in a country of UNHCR: The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East*. *Research Paper, UNHCR Research Paper No 201*.

Kamrava, M., Schmitz, C., Phillips, S., Esser, D. E., Wehrey, F., Mikaelian, S., Salloukh, B. F., Abusharaf, R., De Waal, A., & Babar, Z. (2014). *Fragile Politics: Weak States in the Greater Middle East*.

Karam, J. G., & Majed, R. (2022). *The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Kaufman, A. (2014). Contested frontiers in the Syria-Lebanon-Israel region: Cartography, sovereignty, and conflict. *(No Title)*.

Kaurin, D. (2019). *Data protection and digital agency for refugees*.

Keohane, R. O., & Nye Jr, J. S. (2001). Power and interdependence. *Survival*, *15*(4), 158-165.

Klem, B. (2012). In the Eye of the Storm: Sri Lanka's Front-Line Civil Servants in Transition. *Development and Change*, *43*(3), 695-717.

Knudsen, A., & Hanafi, S. (2010). *Palestinian refugees: Identity, space and place in the Levant* (Vol. 9). Routledge.

Knudsen, A. J. (2018). The great escape ? Converging refugee crises in Tyre, Lebanon. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *37*(1), 96-115.

Koch, A. (2014). *The Politics of Return*.

Koechlin, L. (2013). *Corruption as an empty signifier: Politics and political order in Africa*. *Brill*.

Korneev, O. (2013). EU migration governance in Central Asia: Everybody's business–nobody's business? *European Journal of Migration and Law*, *15*(3), 301-318.

Koser, K., & Black, R. (1999). The end of the refugee cycle. *The end of the refugee cycle*, 2-17.

Kosmatopoulos, N. (2011). Toward an anthropology of 'state failure': Lebanon's Leviathan and peace expertise. *Social analysis*, *55*(3), 115-142.

Kosmatopoulos, N. (2014). Sentinel matters: The techno-politics of international crisis in Lebanon (and beyond). *Third World Quarterly*, *35*(4), 598-615.

Kostadinova, T. (2013). Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon. By Reinoud Leenders. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. 312p. $45.00. *Perspectives on Politics*, *11*(3), 882-883.

Krafess, J. (2005). The influence of the Muslim religion in humanitarian aid. *International Review of the Red Cross*, *87*(858), 327-342. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383100181378

Kriesi, H. (2016). The politicization of European integration. *J. Common Mkt. Stud.*, *54*, 32.

Krijnen, M., & Fawaz, M. (2010). Exception as the rule: High-end developments in neoliberal Beirut. *Built environment*, *36*(2), 245-259.

Kuwait News Agency (2022). 'Kuwait Continues Humanitarian Aid to Brotherly, Friendly Countries', 16 April 2022, available at: https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=3035353&Language=en

Lacroix, T. (2016). *Migrants: L'impasse européenne*. Armand Colin.

Landwehr, C. (2017). *Depoliticization, Repoliticization, and Deliberative Systems* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198748977.003.0003

Larzillière, P. (2019). The discourse of security in development policies: A genealogical approach to Security Sector Reform. *Development Policy Review*, *37*(3), 384-401.

Lavenex, S. (2002). EU enlargement and the challenge of policy transfer: The case of refugee policy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *28*(4), 701-721. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183021000032272

LCRP 2017-2020, available at: https://lebanon.un.org/en/102825-lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

LCRP 2017-2021 update, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2021-2021-update [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

LCRP 2022-2023, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-2022-2023 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

LCRP Annual Report 2019, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-annual-report-2019 [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

LCRP Annual Report 2021, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2021-annual-report [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Lebanon Support. (2016a). "Formal Informality, Brokering Mechanisms, and Illegality. The impact of the Lebanese State's Policies on Syrian Refugees' Daily Lives". Beirut, *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, available at: http://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/formal-informality-brokering-mechanisms-and-illegality-impact-lebanese-state%E2%80%99s-policies [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Lebanon Support. (2016b). "Syrian Refugees' Livelihoods. The Impact of Progressively Constrained Legislations and Increased Informality on Syrians' Daily Lives," Beirut, *Civil Society Knowledge Centre,* 2016, available at: http://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/syrian-refugees-livelihoods-impact-progressively-constrained-legislations-and-increased [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Lebanon Support. (2016c). "Access to Healthcare for Syrian Refugees. The Impact of Fragmented Service Provision on Syrians' Daily Lives," Beirut, *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, 2016, available at: https:// civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/accesshealthcaresyrianrefugees-ls2016.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Lebanon Support. (2021). Shrinking space, constraints, and fragmentation: Lebanon CSOs civic & operational space during the lockdown, Civil Society Knowledge Center. Available at: https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/shrinking-space-constraints-and-fragmentation-lebanon-csos-civic-operational-space-during-0

Leenders, R. (2004). *Nobody having too much to answer for: Laissez-faire, networks, and postwar reconstruction in Lebanon. Networks of privilege in the Middle East: The politics of economic reform revisited, 169-200*.

Leenders, R. (2017). *Spoils of truce: Corruption and state-building in postwar Lebanon. Cornell University Press*.

Legal Agenda. (2019). "Position Paper on the decision to summarily deport Syrian nationals who entered Lebanon irregularly," Website, *The Legal Agenda*, available at: https://legal-agenda.com/ uploads/Position%20Paper%20on%20the%20decision%20to%20summarily%20depor t%20Syrian%20 nationals%20who%20entered%20Lebanon%20irregularly.pdf.

Lenner, K., & Turner, L. (2021). Governing Displacement in the Middle East: From Vulnerability to Resilience? *Governing*.

Li, Y. (2019). Saudi Arabia's Economic Diplomacy through Foreign Aid: Dynamics, Objectives and Mode. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, *13*(1), 110-122. https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2019.1586367

Lindsay, A. (2017). Surge and selection: Power in the refugee resettlement regime. *Forced Migration Review*, *54*.

Lippert, R. (1999). Governing refugees: The relevance of governmentality to understanding the international refugee regime. *Alternatives*, *24*(3), 295-328.

Lister, S. (2003). NGO Legitimacy: Technical Issue or Social Construct? *Critique of Anthropology*, *23*(2), 175-192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X03023002004

Littoz-Monnet, A. (2017). Expert knowledge as a strategic resource: International bureaucrats and the shaping of bioethical standards. *International Studies Quarterly*, *61*(3), 584-595.

Loescher, Gil. (2001). *The UNHCR and world politics: A perilous path*. *OUP Oxford*.

Long, K. (2009). Early repatriation policy: Russian refugee return 1922–1924. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22(2), 133-154.

Louis, M., & Maertens, L. (2021). *Why international organizations hate politics*. *Depoliticizing the world*. *Routledge*.

Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A radical view*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lumsdaine, D. H. (1993). *Moral vision in international politics: The foreign aid regime, 1949-1989*. Princeton University Press.

Maertens, L., & Parizet, R. (2017). 'We Don't Do Politics!' Practices of Depoliticization in UNDP and UNEP. *Critique internationale*, 76(3), 41-60.

Malkki, L. H. (1995). Refugees and exile: From' refugee studies' to the national order of things. *Annual review of anthropology*, 24(1), 495-523.

Martin, G., & Antoine, P. (2013). *Disciplining the transnational mobility of people*.

Médard, J. F. (1995). Patrimonialism, patrimonialisation, neo-patrimonialism and the study of the postcolonial state in sub-Saharan Africa. *University of Oslo, December*.

Médard, J. F. (1982). *L'état sous-développe en Afrique noire: Clientelisme politique ou neo-patrimonialisme?* (Vol. 1). Centre d'étude d'Afrique noire, Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux ….

Meier, D. (2013). Borders, boundaries and identity building in Lebanon: An introduction. *Mediterranean Politics*, 18(3), 352-357.

Mérand, F. (2021). *The Political Commissioner: A European Ethnography*. Oxford University Press.

Mérand, F. (2022). Political work in the stability and growth pact. *Journal of European public policy*, 29(6), 846-864.

Mhaissen, R., & Hodges, E. (2019). Unpacking return: Syrian refugees' conditions and concerns. *SAWA for Development and Aid*, 18.

Milner, J., Betts, A. et Loescher, G. (2012). *UNHCR: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection*. *Routledge*.

Miller, P., & Rose, N. (2008). *Governing the present: Administering economic, social and personal life*. Polity.

Miramond, E. (2020). Humanitarian Detention and Deportation: The IOM and Anti-Trafficking in Laos. *The International Organization for Migration: The New 'UN Migration Agency'in Critical Perspective*, 245-269.

Mitrany, D. (1966). *A Working Peace System: Introd. By Hans J. Morgenthau*. Quadrangle Books.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar (2018). 'Qatar Renews Commitment to Supporting Palestinian, Syrian Peoples', accessible at: https://www.mofa.gov.qa/en/all-mofa-

news/details/2018/09/11/qatar-renews-commitment-to-supporting-palestinian-syrian-peoples [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar (2019). 'Qatar Announces Contribution of 100 USD Million to Alleviate the Suffering of Syrian People', accessible at: https://www.mofa.gov.qa/en/all-mofa-news/details/2019/03/14/qatar-announces-contribution-of-$100-million-to-alleviate-the-suffering-of-syrian-people [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

Mohan, G., & Stokke, K. (2000). Participatory development and empowerment: The dangers of localism. *Third World Quarterly*, *21*(2), 247-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590050004346

Mouawad, J. (2015). *The Negotiated State: State-Society Relations in Lebanon, PhD*. Londres: SOAS.

Mouawad, J. (2018). *Lebanon's border areas in light of the Syrian war: New actors, old marginalisation*.

Mouawad, J., & Bauman, H. (2017). In search of the Lebanese state. *The Arab Studies Journal*, *25*(1), 60-65.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. Psychology Press.

Mourad, L. (2017). Inaction as policy-making: Understanding Lebanon's early response to the refugee influx. *POMEPS Studies: Refugees and migration movements in the Middle East*, *25*, 49-55.

Murray Li, T. (2007). Practices of assemblage and community forest management. *Economy and Society*, *36*(2), 263-293. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140701254308

Myrttinen, H., Khattab, L., & Naujoks, J. (2017). Re-thinking hegemonic masculinities in conflict-affected contexts. *Critical Military Studies*, *3*(2), 103-119.

Nyers, P. (2006). Taking rights, mediating wrongs: Disagreements over the political agency of non-status refugees. In *The Politics of Protection* (p. 60-79). Routledge.

OCHA. (2020). Financial tracking service, available at: https://fts.unocha.org/countries/124/summary/2020/.

OCHA. (2021a). Financial tracking service, available at: https://fts.unocha.org/countries/124/summary/2021/.

OCHA. (2021b). Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021) - Painful reality and uncertain prospects, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/multidimensional-poverty-lebanon-2019-2021-painful-reality-and-uncertain-prospects.

OCHA. (2022). Financial tracking service, available at: https://fts.unocha.org/countries/124/summary/2022/.

OECD. (2011). *International Engagement in Fragile States: Can't We Do Better?*

OECD. (2021). *How Arab countries and institutions finance development*.

Okur & Graham (2021). Civil Society in the Syria crisis: report on the online consultations for the Brussels V Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region.

Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2022). *Humanitarian borders: Unequal mobility and saving lives*. Verso Books.

Paoletti, E. (2011). Power relations and international migration: The case of Italy and Libya. *Political studies*, *59*(2), 269-289.

Parreira, C. (2020). *The Art of Not Governing: Local Politics in Postwar Lebanon*. Stanford University.

Parreira, C. (2022). 'Do elections in Lebanon Matter?', *The Policy Initiative*, https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/137/do-elections-in-lebanon-matter

Paul, C. (1982). *Light, The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Carter*.

Pécoud, A. (2013). *Introduction: Disciplining the transnational mobility of people*. Springer.

Pécoud, A. (2015). *Depoliticising migration: Global governance and international migration narratives*. Springer.

Pécoud, A. (2018). What do we know about the International Organization for Migration? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(10), 1621-1638.

Pécoud, A., & Pécoud, A. (2015). Depoliticising migration. *Depoliticising migration: Global governance and international migration narratives*, 95-123.

Peters, B. G. (2013). Politicisation: What is it and why should we care? *Civil servants and politics: A delicate balance*, 12-24.

Petersen, M. J. (2016). *For humanity or for the Umma?: Aid and Islam in transnational Muslim NGOs*. Oxford University Press.

Petiteville, F. (2017a). International organizations beyond depoliticized governance. *Globalizations*, *15*(3), 301-313. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1370850

Petiteville, F. (2017b). La politisation résiliente des organisations internationales. *Critique internationale*, *3*, 9-19.

Picard, É. (2016). *Liban-Syrie, intimes étrangers: Un siècle d'interactions sociopolitiques*. Éditions Actes Sud.

Potter, J., & Mulkay, M. (1985). Scientists' interview talk: Interviews as a technique for revealing participants' interpretative practices. *The research interview: Uses and approaches*, 247-271.

Poulantzas, N. A. (2000). *State, power, socialism* (Vol. 29). Verso.

Poulantzas, N. (2018). *Political power and social classes*. Verso Books.

Rancière, J. (1995). *On the shores of politics*. Verso.

Reyes, A. (2011). Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society*, *22*(6), 781-807. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511419927

Rist, G. (1996). *Le développement. Histoire d'une croyance occidentale*. Sciences Po (Les Presses de).

Robinson, C. (2020). Measuring 'Well-Governed'Migration: The IOM's Migration Governance Indicators. *The International Organization for Migration: The New 'UN Migration Agency' in Critical Perspective*, 123-143.

Rodriguez, A.-L. (2019). European attempts to govern African youths by raising awareness of the risks of migration: Ethnography of an encounter. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(5), 735-751.

Roy, A. (2004). "Help that hinders," *Monde Diplomatique*, available at: https://mondediplo.com/2004/11/16roy

Salisbury, P. (2018). *Aiding and abetting ? The GCC states, foreign assistance, and shifting approaches to stability*.

Salloukh, B. F., Barakat, R., Al-Habbal, J. S., Khattab, L. W., & Mikaelian, S. (2016). *The politics of sectarianism in postwar Lebanon*. JSTOR.

Sandvik, K. B. (2011). Blurring Boundaries: Refugee Resettlement in Kampala-between the Formal, the Informal, and the Illegal. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, *34*(1), 11-32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1555-2934.2011.01136.x

Saudi Embassy (2015). 'Saudi Arabia Received 2.5 Million Syrians Since Beginning of Conflict,' 11 September 2015, https://www.saudiembassy.net/press-release/saudi-arabia-received-25-million-syrians-beginning-conflict

Scalettaris, G. (2013). *La fabrique du gouvernement international des réfugiés: Bureaugraphie du HCR dans la crise afghane*.

Scalettaris, G. (2018). L'ethnographe embarqué et la pensée institutionnelle du Hcr. *Au cœur des mondes de l'aide internationale: Regards et postures ethnographiques*, 75.

Scheel, S., & Ratfisch, P. (2014). Refugee protection meets migration management: UNHCR as a global police of populations. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, *40*(6), 924-941.

Scherf, T. (2020). The IOM's Humanitarian Border Management in the West African Ebola Crisis (2014–2016). *The International Organization for Migration: The New 'UN Migration Agency'in Critical Perspective*, 217-244.

Schmelter, S. (2019). Gulf States' Humanitarian Assistance for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. *Civil Society Review*. https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.003.004

Screti, F. (2013). Defending Joy against the Popular Revolution: Legitimation and delegitimation through songs. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *10*(2), 205-222.

Sending, O. J. (2015). *The politics of expertise: Competing for authority in global governance*. University of Michigan Press.

Sharma, A. (2006). Introduction: Rethinking theories of the state in an age of globalization. *Division II Faculty Publications*, 42.

Slaughter, A., & Crisp, J. (2009). A surrogate state?: The role of UNHCR in protracted refugee situations.

Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2017). The Janus Face of Governance Theory. *Anti-Politics Depoliticization, and Governance*, 28-48.

Sözer, H. (2020). Humanitarianism with a neo-liberal face: vulnerability intervention as vulnerability redistribution. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *46*(11), 2163-2180.

Sözer, H. (2021). Categories that blind us, categories that bind them: The deployment of the notion of vulnerability for Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(3), 2775-2803.

Stachowitsch, S., & Sachseder, J. (2019). The gendered and racialized politics of risk analysis. The case of Frontex. *Critical studies on security*, *7*(2), 107-123.

Stel, N. (2020). *Hybrid Political Order and the Politics of Uncertainty: Refugee Governance in Lebanon* (1ʳᵉ éd.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429434716

Stevens, D. E. (2016). Access to Justice for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. *Forthcoming in M. O'Sullivan and D. Stevens, States, the Law and Access to Refugee Protection: Fortresses and Fairness (Hart, 2016/17).*

Stone, D. (2017). Global Governance Depoliticized. *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*, 91.

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *The Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 571. https://doi.org/10.2307/258788

Szeftel, M. (1998). *Misunderstanding African politics: Corruption & the governance agenda. Review of African political economy, 25(76), 221-240.*

Thiollet, H. (2016). Gérer les migrations, gérer les migrants: Une perspective historique et transnationale sur les migrations dans les monarchies du Golfe. *Arabian Humanities. Revue internationale d'archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, 7.

Tholens, S. (2017). Border management in an era of 'statebuilding lite': Security assistance and Lebanon's hybrid sovereignty. *International Affairs*, *93*(4), 865-882.

Ticktin, M. (2006). Where ethics and politics meet. *American ethnologist*, *33*(1), 33-49.

Tok, E. (2015). *Gulf Donors and the 2030 Agenda:Towards a Khaleeji Mode of Development Cooperation. New york: United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. Https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/ UNU:3322/unu_cpr_khaleeji.pdf.*

Torfing, J. (1999). *New theories of discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek.*

Traboulsi, F. (2012). *A history of modern Lebanon*. Pluto Press.

Tsourapas, G. (2019). The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *4*(4), 464-481. https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz016

Turner, M. (2019). 'Aid intervention' in the occupied Palestinian territory: Do Gulf Arab donors act differently from Western donors? *Conflict, Security & Development*, *19*(3), 283-288.

Turner, L. (2018). *Challenging refugee men: Humanitarianism and masculinities in Za'tari refugee camp*.

Turner, L. (2021a). Internal solidarity, external migration management: The EU pact and migration policy towards Jordan. *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in light of the United Nations Global Compact on Refugees: International Experiences on Containment and Mobility and their Impacts on Trust and Rights*.

Turner, L. (2021b). The politics of labeling refugee men as "vulnerable". *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, *28*(1), 1-23.

Tvedt, T. (2002). Development NGOs: Actors in a global civil society or in a new international social system? *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations*, 363-375.

UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2017a) *Promoting Global Peace and Prosperity: UAE Policy for Foreign Assistance 2017–2021*, January 2017, available at: https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/the-ministry/uae-international-development-cooperation/uae- foreign-aid-policy [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2017b). 'Lebanese Official Praises UAE's Role in Helping Syrian Refugees', 16 May 2017, available at: https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/404?item=%2fmediahub%2fnews%2fyears%2f2017%2f5%2f16%2f16-05-2017-uae-+displaced-syrians&user=extranet%5cAnonymous&site=LDSC [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019) *United Arab Emirates Foreign Aid Reports*. Available at: https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR (1951). Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html

UNHCR (1967). Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-relating-status-refugees

UNHCR (2003a). UNHCR Handbook for Registration, available at: https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3f967dc14.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR (2003b): Memorandum of Understanding with the Lebanese authorities.

UNHCR (2011). *Resettlement handbook.* Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf/.

UNHCR. (2015). 'Emergency Handbook,' Website, available at: https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/78614/working-with-a-host-government [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR 2012: International Protection Consideration on the Syrian crisis

UNHCR (2017). 2017 Protection and Solutions Strategy for Refugees in Lebanon

UNHCR. (2018a). Update on durable solutions for Syrian refugees.

UNHCR. (2018b). 'Regional Sur Survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan', *Relief Web.*

https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/fourth-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria-rpis

UNHCR (2019a). Global Compact on Refugees: Lebanon's good practices.

UNHCR. (2019b). 'Regional Sur Survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan', *Relief Web, available at:* https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/fifth-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria-rpis

UNHCR (2019c). Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). Available at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/73118

UNHCR. (2019d). Fact Sheet, Website, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 2019, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/03/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-Fact- sheet-February-2019.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR. (2020a). Fact Sheet, Website, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2020/02/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-Fact-sheet-January-2020.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR. (2020b). Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination under UNHCR's Mandate. https://www.unhcr.org/media/procedural-standards-refugee-status-determination-under-unhcrs-mandate

UNHCR (2020c). Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). Available at: https://ialebanon.unhcr.org/vasyr/files/vasyr_reports/VASyR%202020.pdf

UNHCR. (2021a). Fact Sheet, Website, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2021/10/UNHCR-Lebanon-Fact-Sheet-Aug.-2021.pdf [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR (2021b). 'Regional Survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan', *Relief Web, available at:* https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/sixth-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria-rpis [last accessed: 15 April 2023].

UNHCR (2021c). Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). Available at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90589

UNHCR. (2022). Fact Sheet, Website, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2022/03/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-Fact-Sheet-Jan.-2022.pdf

https://globalcompactrefugees.org/media/global-compact-refugees-lebanons-good-practices

Van Dessel, J. (2019). International delegation and Agency in the externalization process of EU Migration and asylum policy: The role of the IOM and the UNHCR in Niger. *European journal of migration and law*, *21*(4), 435-458.

Van Dessel, J. (2021). Externalization through 'awareness-raising': The border spectacle of EU migration information campaigns in Niger. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1-21.

Verdeil, E. (2005). *Récents litiges frontaliers entre Syrie et Liban. Mappemonde, (78).*

Virginie Troit and Marie-Noëlle Abi Yaghi. (2020). *Humanitarian Transition in Lebanon* (Katharla).

Waever, O., Buzan, B., Kelstrup, M., & Lemaitre, P. (1993). *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe. New York: St.*

Walker, P., & Maxwell, D. G. (2008). *Shaping the humanitarian world.* Routledge.

Walters, W. (2015). Reflections on Migration and Governmentality. *Movements. Journal for critical migration and border regime studies*, *1*(1).

Wee, K., Vanyoro, K. P., & Jinnah, Z. (2018). Repoliticizing international migration narratives? Critical reflections on the Civil Society Days of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. *Globalizations*, *15*(6), 795-808. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1446600

Weedon, C. (1996). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory.*

Welfens, N., & Bonjour, S. (2021). Families first? The mobilization of family norms in refugee resettlement. *International Political Sociology*, *15*(2), 212-231.

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems thinker*, *9*(5), 2-3.

Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1988). Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires. *Analysing everyday explanation: A casebook of methods*, *1688183*.

Wilson, T. M., & Donnan, H. (1998). *Border identities: Nation and state at international frontiers.* Cambridge University Press.

Wimmer, A., & Glick Schiller, N. (2002). Methodological nationalism and beyond: Nation–state building, migration and the social sciences. *Global networks*, *2*(4), 301-334.

Wodak, R., & Forchtner, B. (2018). *The Routledge handbook of language and politics.* Routledge London and New York.

Wood, M., & Flinders, M. (2014). Rethinking depoliticisation: Beyond the governmental. *Policy & politics*, *42*(2), 151-170.

World Bank (2021). The World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor (LEM), "*The Great Denial*", Fall 2021. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36862

Yassin, N., Osseiran, T., Rassi, R., & Boustani, M. (2015). No place to stay ? Reflections on the Syrian refugee shelter policy in Lebanon. *Refugee Research and Policy in the Arab World*.

Yassin, N. *101 Facts and Figures on the Syrian Refugee Crisis*. Beirut: Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.

Young, K. E. (2017). A new politics of GCC economic statecraft: The case of UAE aid and financial intervention in Egypt. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, *7*(1), 113-136.

Zbeeb, M. (2023). 'Lebanon's Postwar Political Economy: From Reconstruction to Collapse', *in* Karam, J. G., & Majed, R. *The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 28-42.

Zetter, R. (1991). Labelling refugees: Forming and transforming a bureaucratic identity. *Journal of refugee studies*, *4*(1), 39-62.

Ziadah, R. (2019). Circulating power: Humanitarian logistics, militarism, and the United Arab Emirates. *Antipode*, *51*(5), 1684-1702.

Zolberg, A. R. (1989). The next waves: migration theory for a changing world. *International migration review*, *23*(3), 403-430.

Zolberg, A. R. (2006). Managing a World on the Move. *Population and Development Review*, *32*, 222-253.

Zureik, E. (2017). Qatar's humanitarian aid to Palestine. *Third World Quarterly*, *39*(4), 786-798.

Zürn, M. (2014). The politicization of world politics and its effects: Eight propositions. *European Political Science Review*, *6*(1), 47-71. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773912000276

Zürn, M., Binder, M., & Ecker-Ehrhardt, M. (2012). International authority and its politicization. *International Theory*, *4*(1), 69-106. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971912000012

ANNEXES:

Annex 1: interview schedule

ECHO officer	Beirut	September 2018
EU Delegation attaché	Beirut	September 2018
Representative of ECHO-Syria	Beirut	September 2018
Delegate of the ICRC	Beirut	September 2018
UNHCR Beqaa officer	Zahle	September 2018
UNHCR Beqaa assistant	Zahle	September 2018
UNHCR Beqaa officer	Zahle	September 2018
UNHCR officer	Tripoli	October 2018
UNHCR officer	Tripoli	October 2018
Representative of the French embassy	Beirut	October 2018
Representative of the IOM	Beirut	October 2018
UNHCR resettlement assistant	Beirut	October 2018
Representative of the IOM	Beirut	October 2018
EU Delegation officer	Beirut	October 2018
UNHCR officer	Beirut	October 2018
European diplomat	Beirut	October 2018
Representative of a European NGO	Beirut	October 2018
UNHCR officer	Beirut	October 2018
Former UNHCR resettlement assistant	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of UNHCR resettlement office	Beirut	November 2018
Former UNHCR resettlement assistant	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Persons	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of the Ministry of State for Displaced Persons	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of the ICRC	Zahle	November 2018
Retired General from GSO, Beirut	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of a European embassy	Beirut	November 2018
IMCPD project officer	Beirut	November 2018
ICMPD key expert	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of the Customs administration	Beirut	November 2018
Representative of the Lebanese maritime Customs	Beirut	November 2018

UNHCR officer	Zahle	December 2018
Representative of OFPRA delegation	Beirut	December 2018
Representative of OFPRA delegation	Beirut	December 2018
Lebanese diplomat	Beirut	December 2018
Representative of the NGO ALEF	Beirut	December 2018
Representative of the Customs administration	Beirut	December 2018
ICMPD project officer	Beirut	December 2018
Representative of the ICRC	Tripoli	December 2018
Representative of the NGO forum	Beirut	December 2018
Representative of the Customs administration	Beirut	December 2018
Lebanese representative of the UNHCR	Zahle	December 2018
Representative of UNHCR	Zahle	December 2018
Representative of the NGO Nabad	Riyak	December 2018
Representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs	Beirut	December 2018
Interview with a Syrian refugee	Beirut	December 2018
Interview with a Syrian refugee	Zahle	December 2018
IMCPD project officer	Beirut	January 2019
Representative of the Lebanese land Customs	Beirut	January 2019
Representative of the EU Delegation	Beirut	January 2019
ICRC delegate	Tripoli	January 2019
Syrian refugee	Beirut	January 2019
Syrian refugee	Tripoli	January 2019
Lebanese diplomat	Paris	March 2019
Representative of House of Peace	Skype	April 2019
Representative of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education	Beirut	September 2019
Interview with a representative of the Danish Red Cross and International Federation of the Red Crescent Societies	Beirut	September 2019
Interview with a member of Tripoli municipal Council	Beirut	October 2019
ICMPD consultant	Beirut	October 2019
Representative of URDA	Beirut	November 2019
Representative of a European NGO	Beirut	November 2019
Director of Thiqah charity	Tripoli	November 2019
Director of Tripoli-based charity	Tripoli	November 2019
Representative of URDA	Beirut	November 2019
Representative of Muslim Aid, Aarsal	Beirut	November 2019

Representative of the Qatari Red Crescent	Aarsal	November 2019
Interview with a European diplomat	Beirut	November 2019
Syrian refugee	Beirut	November 2019
Representative of URDA	Beirut	December 2019
ICMPD consultant	Beirut	December 2019
Syrian teacher	Tripoli	December 2019
Representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs	Beirut	December 2019
Maire of a municipality in Akkar	Akkar	December 2019
Representative of Akkarouna	Tripoli	December 2019
Representative of Akkarouna	Halba	December 2019
Representative of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent	Beirut	January 2020
Representatives of the Palestinian Red Crescent	Saida	January 2020
Director of the Islamic Medical Association	Tripoli	January 2020
Representative of the Legal Agenda	Beirut	January 2020
Attaché from the UAE Embassy	Beirut	January 2020
Representative of the French MFA	Beirut	January 2020
Representative of Islamic Relief	Beirut	January 2020
Interview with an employee of the Lebanese Red Cross	Beirut	January 2020
EU Delegation, project manager	Beirut	January 2020
European diplomat	Beirut	January 2020
ICMPD project officer	Beirut	January 2020
Municipal advisor, Bab al Tabbeneh	Tripoli	January 2020
Representative of Tripoli municipality	Tripoli	January 2020
Representative of Al Fares	Halba	January 2020
Representatives of the Rahma Centre for Community Services	Saida	January 2020
Representative of the municipality of Baalbeck	Baalbeck	January 2020
Director of the Islamic Medical Association	Tripoli	January 2020
Representative of Dar el Fatwa	Beirut	January 2020
Representative of a Syrian Charity	Aarsal	January 2020
Representative of Dar el Fatwa	Beirut	January 2020
Representative of Rahma Medical Center	Tripoli	January 2020
Sunni religious authority	Baalbeck	January 2020
ICMPD project officer	Beirut	January 2020
Syrian refugee	Beirut	January 2020
Syrian refugee	Zahle	January 2020

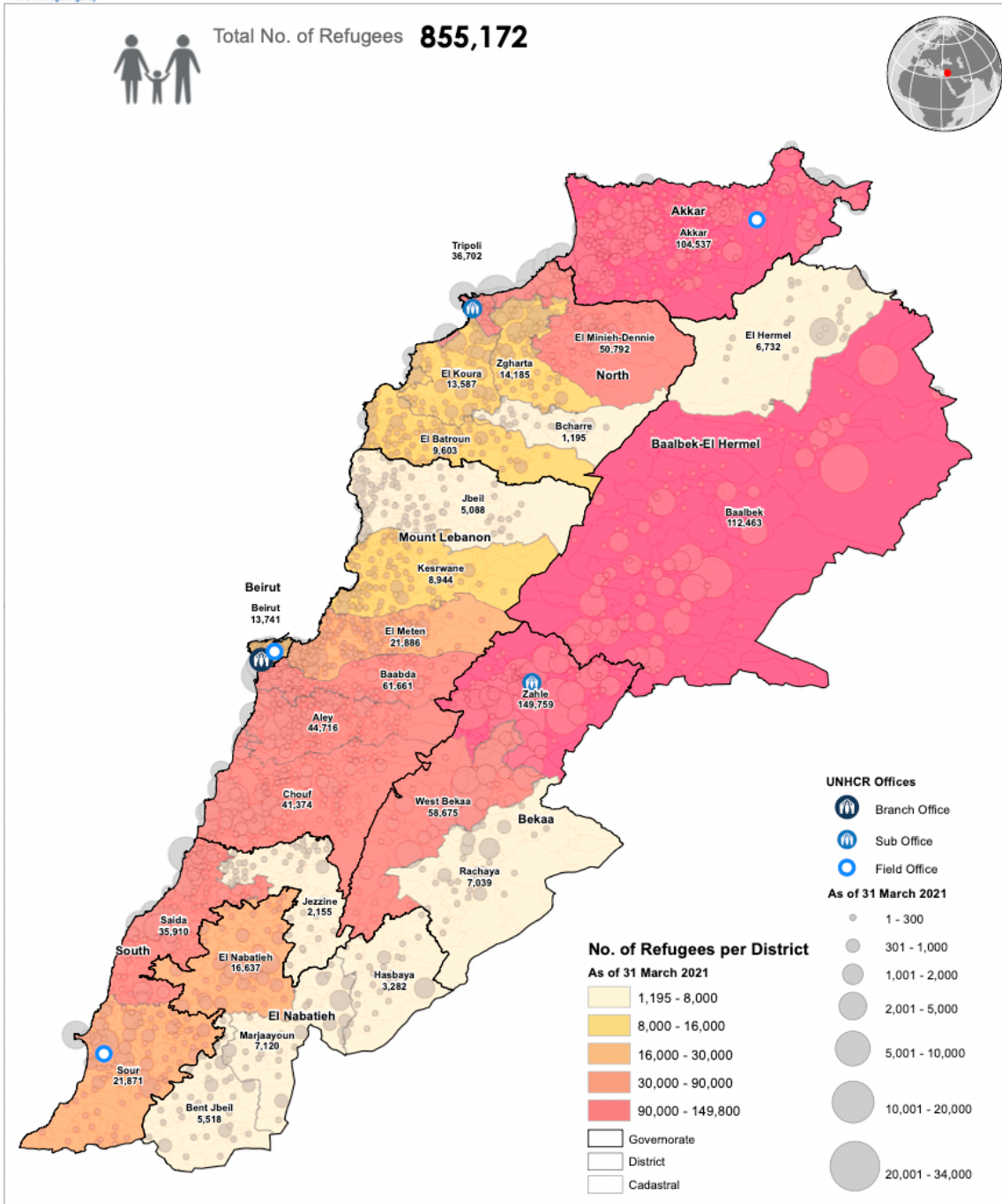| Representative of the French MFA	Paris	February 2020
Representative of a European aid agency	Brussels	February 2020
Security officer from the European Commission	Brussels	February 2020
Representatives of the DG NEAR, European Commission	Brussels	February 2020
Representative of the DG NEAR, European Commission	Brussels	February 2020
Representative of ECHO	Brussels	February 2020
Representative of DG HOME	Brussels	February 2020
Representative of EEAS	Brussels	February 2020
Representative of KSRelief	Skype	February 2020
Representative of GIZ	Skype	February 2020
Interview with a UNHCR protection officer based in Beirut	Skype	March 2021
Interview with a representative of ICMPD Lebanon	Beirut	September 2021
Interview with a representative of the EU Delegation	Beirut	September 2021
Interview with a representative of the Norwegian Refugee Council	Beirut	September 2021
Interview with a representative of UNHCR	Beirut	September 2021
Representative of the European Commission	Beirut	September 2021
Interview with a former employee of Caritas	Skype	September 2021
Representative of GSO	Beirut	October 2021
Representative of ECHO	Beirut	October 2021
Representative of URDA	Beirut	October 2021
Representative of the WFP	Beirut	October 2021
Representative of a Lebanese think tank	Beirut	October 2021
Interview with a representative of AFD	Beirut	October 2021
ICMPD project officer	Beirut	October 2021
UNHCR resettlement assistant	Zahlé	October 2021
Representative of Banin	Beirut	October 2021
Representative of a Lebanese NGO	Jdeideh	November 2021
Representative of Kulluna Irada	Beirut	November 2021
Representative of URDA	Beirut	November 2021

Annex 2: Lebanon's maps (LCRP & UNHCR)

REFERENCE MAP

SYRIA REFUGEE RESPONSE
LEBANON Syrian Refugees Registered
31 March 2021

Total No. of Refugees **855,172**

Akkar
Akkar
104,537

Tripoli
36,702

El Minieh-Dennie
50,792

El Hermel
6,732

El Koura
13,587

Zgharta
14,185

North

El Batroun
9,603

Bcharre
1,195

Baalbek-El Hermel

Jbeil
5,088

Mount Lebanon

Baalbek
112,463

Kesrwane
8,944

Beirut
Beirut
13,741

El Meten
21,886

Baabda
61,661

Zahle
149,759

Aley
44,716

Chouf
41,374

West Bekaa
58,675

Bekaa

Rachaya
7,039

Jezzine
2,155

Saida
35,910

South

El Nabatieh
16,637

Hasbaya
3,282

Marjaayoun
7,120

El Nabatieh

Sour
21,871

Bent Jbeil
5,518

UNHCR Offices

Branch Office

Sub Office

Field Office

As of 31 March 2021

- 1 - 300
- 301 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 2,000
- 2,001 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 20,000
- 20,001 - 34,000

No. of Refugees per District
As of 31 March 2021

- 1,195 - 8,000
- 8,000 - 16,000
- 16,000 - 30,000
- 30,000 - 90,000
- 90,000 - 149,800

Governorate

District

Cadastral

This map has been produced by the Inter-Agency Information Management Unit of UNHCR based on maps and material provided by the Government of Lebanon for operational purposes. It does not constitute an official United Nations map. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Data Sources:
- Refugee population and location data by UNHCR as of 31 March 2021. For more information on refugee data, contact Diana El Habr at elhabr@unhcr.org

GIS and Mapping by UNHCR Lebanon. For further information on map, contact
Jad Ghosn at ghosn@unhcr.org or Maroun Sader at sader@unhcr.org

Annex 3: UNHCR Lebanon annual budget 2014-2022
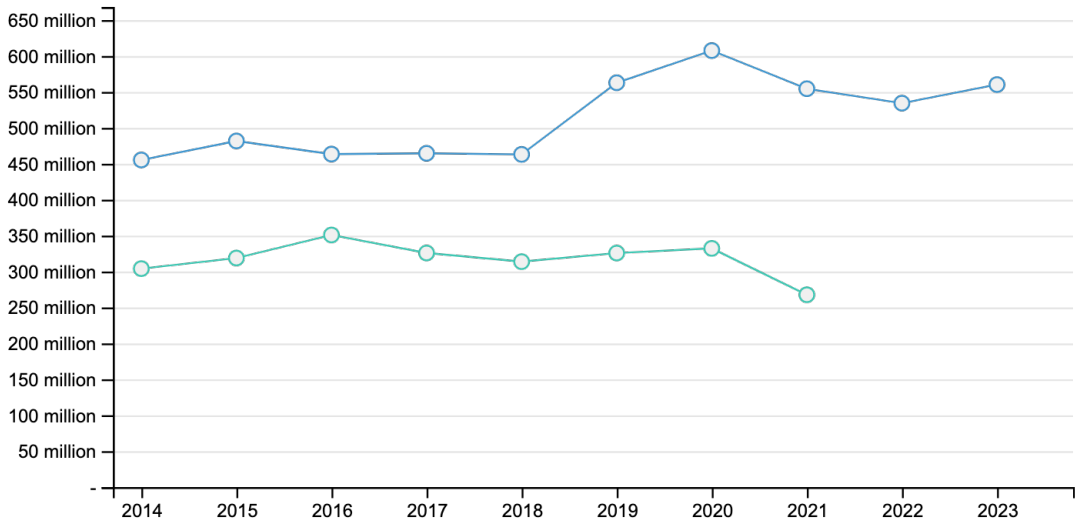
Annex 4: Resettlement trends, Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Source: UNHCR data finder, resettlement.