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Charlotte Vera Van Der Werf

# Lebanon's October Uprising A Clean Slate for Syrian Refugees?

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ARMA, The Arab Master's Programme in Democracy and  
Human Rights

CHARLOTTE VERA VAN DER WERF

LEBANON'S OCTOBER UPRISING: A CLEAN SLATE FOR  
SYRIAN REFUGEES?

## FOREWORD

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- Van Der Werf, Charlotte Vera, *Lebanon's October Uprising: A Clean Slate for Syrian Refugees?* Supervisor: Zeina El-Hélou, Saint Joseph University (Lebanon). Arab Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights (ARMA), coordinated by Saint Joseph University (Lebanon).

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This publication includes the thesis *Lebanon's October Uprising: A Clean Slate for Syrian Refugees?* written by Charlotte Vera Van Der Werf and supervised Zeina El-Hélou, Saint Joseph University (Lebanon).

#### BIOGRAPHY

After graduating with a Msc in Political Science from Leiden University and her MA in Human Rights and Democratisation from the Global Campus Arab World, Charlotte has moved on to work for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

#### ABSTRACT

Lebanon's October uprising of 2019 set off a country-wide movement calling for change affecting the core of the political system. With corruption and clientelism being endemic to the sectarian political establishment in Lebanon, the state proved incapable of providing basic public services to its citizens. On top of that, Lebanon is the country with the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide. Besides many Palestinian refugees, the conflict in Syria has led to an estimated 1.5 million refugees who ended up in Lebanon. As a consequence, these refugees have become commonly used as a scapegoat for many of the country's problems. In particular, the state's narrative and media have fed into this. Hence, now that the October uprising mobilised the country against the political system, a more critical view of the state and its narrative evolved. Therefore, this thesis tests whether this criticism of the state has led to a different popular perception of Syrian refugees within the protests. Through in-depth interviewing of prominent Lebanese political activists from the October uprising, data is collected to answer the question: to what extent does the October uprising show a change in how Syrian refugees are perceived in Lebanon?

*The Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University does not intend to give any approval or disapproval to the opinions expressed in this thesis. These opinions belong solely to their author.*

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LCP	Lebanese Communist Party
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
MMFD	Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Widespread political corruption, an economic crisis and a government divided along sectarian lines incapable of providing basic services form the background to Lebanon's October uprising. Proposed tax reforms turned out to be the last straw for the Lebanese population, who took to the streets in massive numbers from 17 October 2019 onwards. Months of demonstrations and civil disobedience brought Lebanon to a critical juncture likely to mark the direction of Lebanon's future significantly. Although the protests did succeed in getting previous Prime Minister Saad Hariri to resign, it is too soon to tell whether the protests made a lasting change, as they are still ongoing.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in a country where politics is complicated by sectarianism, consequent clientelism and corruption, the Lebanese protests offer a novel approach in studying democratic claims and societies' wishes. By analysing the demands of the Lebanese protesters, insights can be gathered into the society's perspective of various issues both within the scope of demands, but also broader debates in the country.

Important to note is the diversity found in Lebanese society, not only in terms of sectarian identities that were weaved into the political system, but also in terms of the many displaced persons who have fled from conflict in Syria or Palestine. The most recent measured value of the refugee population in Lebanon in 2019 ends up at 1,395,952 people.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Lebanon hosts the most refugees per capita of

<sup>1</sup> CA Matamoros, 'Lebanon's Hariri resigns after days of nationwide protests' (*Euronews*, 29 October 2019) <[www.euronews.com/2019/10/29/lebanese-prime-minister-set-to-give-speech-from-official-residence-amid-resignation-rumour](https://www.euronews.com/2019/10/29/lebanese-prime-minister-set-to-give-speech-from-official-residence-amid-resignation-rumour)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, 'Refugee Population by Country or Territory of Asylum – Lebanon' (*The World Bank*) <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POPREFG?locations=LB>> accessed 5 October 2021.

any country in the world.<sup>3</sup> The protracted nature of the Syrian conflict and consequent presence of Syrians in Lebanon causes Syrian refugees often to be used as a scapegoat. Both among the government and the population there is frequent reference to Syrian refugees as being a main factor in Lebanon's hardships, ranging from strain on resources to security risks.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, these refugees find themselves in similarly poor living conditions as the Lebanese who have taken to the streets since the end of 2019. Besides this, a main actor in linking refugee presence to Lebanon's predicaments has been the government which is currently being opposed on the streets.

This raises the question to what extent the protests have brought change in how Syrian refugees are being perceived in Lebanon. Hence this thesis will delve into the representation of the Other within public mobilisation, through this case study of Syrian refugees within the discourse of the Lebanese October uprising. The key objectives of the study comprise of firstly creating an overview of the demands voiced within the October uprising. After that it is necessary to assess if there are differences along the regional spectrum of people participating in the protests. Next, the research delves into if and in what ways refugees are included in the narratives of various groups active in the protests. Lastly, the rhetoric on Syrian refugees throughout the protests following 17 October is analysed.

First and foremost, the topic of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and a background to the Lebanese protests is rooted in a review of the literature. The theoretical framework that follows situates this research study within the field of studying activism and refugee perception. Preliminary findings from the literature review informed the hypotheses that will be tested in the discussion. The first hypothesis argues that it is the government, not refugees, that are perceived as Lebanon's core

<sup>3</sup> S Husain and D Abou-Diab, 'Refugee Conditions Deteriorate amidst Multiple Crises in Lebanon' (*Atlantic Council*, 10 June 2020) <[www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/refugee-conditions-deteriorate-amidst-multiple-crises-in-lebanon/](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/refugee-conditions-deteriorate-amidst-multiple-crises-in-lebanon/)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Beirut Research and Innovation Center of the Lebanese Center for Studies and Research, *Citizens' Perceptions of Security Threats stemming From the Syrian Refugee Presence in Lebanon* (International Alert 2015) <[www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon\\_SSRSyrianRefugees\\_EN\\_2015.pdf](http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon_SSRSyrianRefugees_EN_2015.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021; AM Baylouny and SJ Klingseis, 'Water Thieves or Political Catalysts? Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon' (2018) 25 *Middle East Policy* 104; S Atrache, 'Lebanon at a Crossroads: Growing Uncertainty for Syrian Refugees' (Refugees International 2020) <[www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/28/lebanon-crossroads-growing-uncertainty-syrian-refugees](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/28/lebanon-crossroads-growing-uncertainty-syrian-refugees)> accessed 5 October 2021.

problem by protesters. The second hypothesis argues that protesters link refugees less to issues of public infrastructure, economy, security and politics than was the case for the society's popular perception of refugees prior to the October uprising. Lastly, the final hypothesis argues that the October uprising is not only about political, but also social change, which implies a more inclusive discourse towards vulnerable groups like refugees. By combining this theoretical basis with the current gap in the literature the decision was made to answer the research question through a qualitative approach that is further elaborated on in the methodology. Through the method of qualitative interviewing the results offer a thick description of the phenomenon under consideration. A sample of ten prominent activists from various parties or groups of the October uprising was taken for in-depth interviews. The results of these interviews are analysed in the discussion to answer the question: to what extent does the October uprising show a change in how Syrian refugees are perceived in Lebanon?

2.

LITERATURE REVIEW: PERCEPTION OF REFUGEES

The topic of this research meets at an intersection of studies concerning the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and research into the most recent wave of Lebanon's protests; the October uprising. As such, a very broad body of literature touches upon the topic of this thesis. Therefore, the reviewed literature is structured along the lines of first offering a succinct historical background to Syrians in Lebanon. Secondly, the literature on perception of refugees is reviewed.

2.1. HISTORY OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

Prior to the eruption of the conflict in Syria, Lebanon and Syria already had a long history behind them. The extent to which this history still informs contemporary perceptions of Syrians in Lebanon might differ depending on various factors. Notwithstanding this, it is a good starting point to discern differences or similarities with contemporary views on the Syrian presence.

The Syrian occupation of Lebanon which lasted from 1976 until 2005 left scars in the memories of many Lebanese. On the one hand, Lebanon did benefit in particular economically from the presence of Syrian workers in Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> These Syrian workers played a major role in the reconstruction after the civil war, reflected in the saying 'Lebanon was built with Syrian muscles'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the

<sup>5</sup> T Osoegawa, *Syria and Lebanon: International Relations and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2015) 130.

<sup>6</sup> J Chalcraft, 'Of Specters and Disciplined Commodities: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon' (Middle East Report 2005) 28.

occupation was marked by various human rights violations on behalf of the Syrian regime.<sup>7</sup> Already in 2008, former Prime Minister Saad Hariri managed to establish diplomatic ties between Lebanon and Syria in an attempt of rapprochement, notwithstanding Syria's previous refusal to recognise Lebanese sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> Only three years prior to this, the Cedar Revolution had mobilised people throughout the country calling for a withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. A main trigger had been the assassination of former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, for which the Syrians were held responsible.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this history there was a reasonable presence of Syrian nationals living and working within Lebanon. Apart from the Syrians that remained living in Lebanon, also the memory of 'humiliation, killings and arbitrary power over Lebanese citizens' by the Assad regime remains.<sup>10</sup>

When the conflict in Syria began in 2011, the Lebanese government maintained a 'semi-laissez faire' approach, meaning that Syrians were free to enter Lebanon.<sup>11</sup> In the summer of 2012, a new policy of neutrality towards the Syrian conflict was enforced called the 'dissociation policy'.<sup>12</sup> The new prime minister at the time, Najib Mikati, requested the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 'label refugees as "displaced persons" instead of "refugees" in order to avoid any gathering in camps or treatment under refugee international convention'.<sup>13</sup> Only after the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon passed the point of one fourth of the Lebanese population in 2015 did the government tighten its entry policy.<sup>14</sup> First stricter requirements for entering Lebanon were imposed, followed by a complete halt in registering Syrian refugees entering the country.<sup>15</sup> These followed the October policy of 2014, intended 'to decrease the number of Syrians in Lebanon by reducing

<sup>7</sup> R Avi-Ran, 'Introduction: Origins of the Syrian Involvement in Lebanon' in R Avi-Ran, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon Since 1975* (1st edn, Routledge 2019).

<sup>8</sup> M Yacoubian, 'Lebanon's Evolving Relationship with Syria: Back to the Future or Turning a New Page?' (Policy Brief 33, United States Institute of Peace 2010) 2 <<https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo40381/1.pdf>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>9</sup> EN Kurtulus, "'The Cedar Revolution": Lebanese Independence and the Question of Collective Self-Determination' (2009) 36 *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 195.

<sup>10</sup> D Meier, 'Lebanon: The Refugee Issue and the Threat of a Sectarian Confrontation' (2014) 94 *Oriente Moderno* 382.

<sup>11</sup> E Ferris and K Kirişci, *The Consequences of Chaos* (Brookings Institution Press 2016) 39 <[www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1c2cqw5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1c2cqw5)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Meier (n 10) 383.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Ferris and Kirişci (n 11) 39.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

access to territory and encouraging return to Syria'.<sup>16</sup> Relevant to note is the fact that Lebanon is not a signatory to the convention relating to the status of refugees.<sup>17</sup> Janmyr outlines four arguments as to why Lebanon has not ratified this convention and its protocol relating to the status of refugees.<sup>18</sup> These can be summarised as 1) Lebanon's belief that the convention might require Lebanon to accept permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; 2) the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for refugees has advantages for Lebanon; 3) the 'good-neighbourliness' principle with Syria; and 4) lastly a feeling of redundancy in the eyes of Lebanese government officials and policy makers to sign international conventions on the topic.<sup>19</sup> Many officials said that as Lebanon already voluntarily applies many of the principles within the convention, that makes it redundant.<sup>20</sup> The UNHCR presence is seen as an advantage for Lebanon when seen as taking the responsibility to provide for refugees away from the Lebanese government. This is based on the belief that if Lebanon would sign the 1951 Refugee Convention more of the 'burden' would have to be carried by the government.<sup>21</sup>

Hence there is a discrepancy between how the international community and humanitarian arena perceives Syrians in Lebanon, namely as refugees, and how the Lebanese state perceives them in its discourse. Yet, while the view of the Lebanese population is influenced by both, it does not have to conform to either. Particularly during a time when the population is rising up against its government, the differences in their views on refugee presence become increasingly relevant. Based on the literature on the implications of labelling refugees, the state and the population's discourse on refugees can be critically evaluated. For it tells us not only how the presence of Syrians in Lebanon is understood, but also how it influences their access to rights and protection.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> M Janmyr and L Mourad, 'Modes of Ordering: Labelling, Classification and Categorization in Lebanon's Refugee Response' [2018] *Journal of Refugee Studies* 544, 552 <<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/31/4/544/4792968?redirectedFrom=fulltext>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention).

<sup>18</sup> Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention); Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967) 606 UNTS 267 (Protocol).

<sup>19</sup> M Janmyr, 'No Country of Asylum: "Legitimizing" Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention' (2017) 29 *International Journal of Refugee Law* 438.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* 462.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* 441.

<sup>22</sup> Janmyr and Mourad (n 16).

## 2.2. HOST PERCEPTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

From the literature on Syrian refugees hosted in Lebanon several factors are identified that seem to influence the perception of refugees among the host community. Three overarching themes can be gathered namely; historical factors, economic factors and political factors. Since the October uprising is a confrontation between the Lebanese state and the population out on the street, the perceptions of both are delved into separately along the lines of the aforementioned factors. This is used to come to an understanding of what the label of Syrian refugee has come to mean from different perspectives.

### 2.2.1. *Population narrative*

Throughout the years following the Syrian influx of refugees into Lebanon, opinion polls and further research into the reaction and feelings of the Lebanese population were undertaken. While varied in results, depending on research method, sample area and time period, they do offer insights into what place the Syrian refugee holds in the minds of the Lebanese populace. It has been widely emphasised that the initial period of hosting Syrians showed hospitality and brotherhood throughout Lebanese host communities.<sup>23</sup> While historical factors can play a role in the negative prejudices towards Syrians, they played a positive role in the beginning. Within the population's perception, parallels were drawn with the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 that caused various Lebanese to flee across the border to Syria.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless this war lasted for 34 days, whereas the Syrian conflict and the consequent refugee crisis has become of a protracted nature. The strain on the economy, public infrastructure and political system is reflected in negative opinions of Lebanese citizens, pervading all classes.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, 'the refugee presence is felt most in impoverished host communities that have suffered from decades of the state's

<sup>23</sup> AM Baylouny and SJ Klingseis, 'Water Thieves or Political Catalysts? Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon' (2018) 25 Middle East Policy 104.

<sup>24</sup> M Christophersen, 'Pursuing Sustainable Development Under Sectarianism in Lebanon' (Social Science Research Network 2018) 37 <[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3260878](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3260878)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Baylouny and Klingseis (n 23) 112.

negligence and exclusion'.<sup>26</sup> Lebanon's anti-encampment policy towards Syrian refugees is at the core of this, as the informal settlements are located in 'Lebanon's most economically deprived areas', where the local populations are already struggling.<sup>27</sup> 62% of the Syrian refugees that are registered with UNHCR reside in Bekaa and North Lebanon.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Baylouny and Klingseis stated that while negative effects, perceived or actual effects, 'have been felt disproportionately among poorer communities', it is classes without direct contact where negative opinions about refugees are most pervasive.<sup>29</sup> Class or socio-economic background comes out as a relevant factor influencing the population's opinion in various researches. The perception that 'refugees are living in better conditions than we do' is common.<sup>30</sup> These perceptions are said to relate to pre-existing perceptions of the Syrian presence during the war of 1975-90 and the consequent Syrian occupation of Lebanon.<sup>31</sup> When it comes to the current Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon, 35% of registered Syrian refugees in 2018 lived in substandard shelters.<sup>32</sup>

According to International Alert, a peacebuilding organisation, the top concerns among Lebanese citizens were:

the fear of becoming a victim of crime and the risk of falling into poverty, threats to sectarian balance resulting from the prolonged stay of a large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, service shortages being further exacerbated by the Syrian refugee presence, and environmental risks stemming from dilapidated water and sewerage networks.<sup>33</sup>

This focus on security within International Alert's research in cooperation with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies of 2015 regards security to mean being free from any danger of threat, thus having

<sup>26</sup> S Atrache, 'Lebanon at a Crossroads: Growing Uncertainty for Syrian Refugees' (Refugees International 2020) <[www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/28/lebanon-crossroads-growing-uncertainty-syrian-refugees](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/28/lebanon-crossroads-growing-uncertainty-syrian-refugees)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Christophersen (n 24) 25.

<sup>28</sup> N Yassin, *101 Facts & Figures on the Syrian Refugee Crisis Volume II* (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs 2019) 22.

<sup>29</sup> Baylouny and Klingseis (n 23) 112.

<sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Too Close For Comfort - Syrians in Lebanon' (Middle East Report 141 2013) 9 <<https://d2071andyip0wj.cloudfront.net/too-close-for-comfort-syrians-in-lebanon.pdf>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Meier (n 10) 384.

<sup>32</sup> Yassin (n 28) 39.

<sup>33</sup> Beirut Research and Innovation Center of the Lebanese Center for Studies and Research, *Citizens' Perceptions of Security Threats stemming From the Syrian Refugee Presence in Lebanon* (International Alert 2015) <[www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon\\_SSRSyrianRefugees\\_EN\\_2015.pdf](http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon_SSRSyrianRefugees_EN_2015.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021.

certainty of income and reasonable living standards. Their study found that the vast majority saw conditions worsen after the arrival of Syrian refugees. Yet, how security is perceived is shaped by social markers, such as 'sectarian and political affiliation, prevalent local conditions, types of common threats, gender and age group'.<sup>34</sup> Since security is perceived broadly and citizens' perception is influenced by diverse social markers, observing a clear trend is difficult apart from the overall sense that security is becoming worse. Nonetheless it is interesting to note that 'most lay people interviewed believed that Lebanese people share, or at least understand, the fears of one another'.<sup>35</sup> This is mirrored in several questions distinguishing between personal fear and overall threats. The sectarian balance is a sensitive issue as it undergirds the Lebanese political system. Nonetheless, when asked if respondents were directly concerned regarding the sectarian balance of their own region, the majority did not associate the presence of Syrians with a risk for the sectarian balance, nor did they care.<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, when asked about Syrians being a threat to the sectarian balance of the nation as a whole, 'about 51% of respondents considered the Syrian presence to pose a threat to the Lebanese sectarian balance'.<sup>37</sup> As such, a discrepancy exists between what respondents experienced themselves vis-à-vis what they expect of the overall situation. Consequently this implies an exaggeration of the threat to the sectarian balance on a national level.

Likewise, when it came to the economy, asking if Syrian refugees posed a direct threat to one's personal economic situation, 'only 23% of respondents answered yes'.<sup>38</sup> When it came to whether respondents thought Syrians pose a risk to other Lebanese citizens 74% answered yes.<sup>39</sup> Geographic location was of major influence. For instance among the poor in the north, 'competition with Syrians over limited jobs and resources seems a major concern'.<sup>40</sup> Notably the research found how some clusters in Bekaa acknowledged the possibility of 'positive economic effects from the Syrian refugees, whose labour has significantly contributed to agricultural produce'.<sup>41</sup> In 2018, 69% of Syrian refugee

<sup>34</sup> Beirut Research and Innovation Center of the Lebanese Center for Studies and Research (n 33) 3.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *ibid* 4.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* 5.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

households were living under the poverty line, a number likely rising quickly as a consequence of the financial crisis.<sup>42</sup> The sources of income for registered Syrian refugees were 52% relying on informal debt, 32% World Food Programme assistance and 16% cash assistance from humanitarian organisations, like the UNHCR.<sup>43</sup>

Even though Baylouny and Klingseis show how Syrian refugees have been catalysts in tensions over water security, much of the population's criticism 'is directed toward the citizens' own government'.<sup>44</sup> The opinion polls analysed in this research highlighted how the concern over water superseded any other threat caused by the refugee influx, in the eyes of the population.<sup>45</sup> While seeing refugees as part of the problem and animosity, it is the government which is being held responsible for 'corruption and inequality in provisioning'.<sup>46</sup> The distinction between threats felt on a personal level, versus threats concerned with the country as a whole suggests that some imagined disparities are used to emphasise the division of "we" who belong and "the Others" who do not belong in "our" community' by the Lebanese populace.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.2.2. *State narrative*

The process of othering as highlighted above is fed into by state discourse through framing. Not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 protocol influences how the Lebanese state frames the hosting of refugees. Besides not speaking of refugees but rather 'displaced people', the state also puts focus on being a 'country of transit, rather than asylum'.<sup>48</sup> After the initial period of an open border policy, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities introduced a new policy aiming to limit the number of Syrians entering the country in 2014.<sup>49</sup> The 'delicate sectarian balances' within government have shaped

<sup>42</sup> Yassin (n 28) 44.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* 45.

<sup>44</sup> Baylouny and Klingseis (n 23) 105.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>47</sup> AA Tiltnes, M Christophersen and C Moe Thorleifsson, 'Ambivalent Hospitality. Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon' (FAFO 2013) 37 <[www.academia.edu/9099684/Ambivalent\\_Hospitality\\_Coping\\_Strategies\\_and\\_Local\\_Responses\\_to\\_Syrian\\_Refugees\\_in\\_Lebanon\\_2013](http://www.academia.edu/9099684/Ambivalent_Hospitality_Coping_Strategies_and_Local_Responses_to_Syrian_Refugees_in_Lebanon_2013)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Lebanon Support, 'Formal Informality, Brokering Mechanisms, and Illegality. The Impact of the Lebanese State's Policies on Syrian Refugees' Daily Lives' (Lebanon Support 2016) <[https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/formal\\_informality-brokering\\_mechanisms-illegality-ls2016\\_0.pdf](https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/formal_informality-brokering_mechanisms-illegality-ls2016_0.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*.

the state's response to the refugee influx.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, it seemed that 'community leaders and security officials tended to describe differences in perceptions along sectarian lines as they ranked higher in their positions'.<sup>51</sup> It is particularly the relation between the Sunni and Shia sects causing this tension, as Hezbollah's support of the al Assad regime 'have strained Lebanon's capacity to receive large numbers of primarily Sunni refugees'.<sup>52</sup> It is important to analyse this in the larger context of risks to Lebanon's political stability due to the sectarian balance. It is this balance outlined in the power-sharing Ta'if agreement of 1989 that has informed Lebanese politics ever since.<sup>53</sup> Hence, the different sectarian demographics of Syrian refugees pose a threat to the sectarian balance, which has been emphasised in the media and political discourse.<sup>54</sup> The influence of politics becomes clear in the distinction between merit voters and dogmatic voters and their perception of refugees; 'while merit voters tended to blame local factors, dogmatic voters generally blamed Syrian refugees'.<sup>55</sup> International Alert's report connected this to the role of the media and representations of security.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the political dimension of what the refugee presence can do to the sectarian balance has led to various human rights abuses against Syrian refugees by state institutions.<sup>57</sup> These include 'house demolitions, collective evictions, curfews that single them out, or arrests because they lack extremely hard-to-get residency permits'.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, in her report for Refugees International, Atrache points out how Lebanese officials have 'exploited the refugee presence for political gain' shown through 'racist and xenophobic declarations against Syrians'.<sup>59</sup>

The economic challenge is also particularly prevalent in the state's narrative. Yet the state has generally neglected to mention how 'the inflow of humanitarian aid (...) has been calculated to have had significant positive multiplier effect on the Lebanese economy'.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Meier (n 10) 383; Ferris and Kirişci (n 11) 39.

<sup>51</sup> Beirut Research and Innovation Center of the Lebanese Center for Studies and Research (n 33) 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ferris and Kirişci (n 11) 39.

<sup>53</sup> Beirut Research and Innovation Center of the Lebanese Center for Studies and Research (n 33) 4.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* 5.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Atrache (n 26) 4.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Atrache (n 26) 4.

<sup>60</sup> Ferris and Kirişci (n 11) 60.

Within humanitarian aid there has been concern for vulnerable host communities. An estimate of 1,500,000 host community members were affected by the Syrian crisis and included in the UN's crisis response plan.<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, the Syrian crisis also contributed to 'the decline of income from tourism, trade and investments' in Lebanon.<sup>62</sup> Multiple authors emphasised how societal issues in Lebanon over the economic situation or the strain on public infrastructure are not only blamed on the presence of refugees, but how these issues also 'lay bare the inadequacies of the states' infrastructural capacity'.<sup>63</sup> This is exemplified by a quote from an interview with an official at the Ministry of Energy and Water in Baylouny and Klingseis' research stating '[b]ecause of the Syrians, a water balance that should have been negative in 2030 is negative now'.<sup>64</sup> An interview in Christophersen's research with another government official mentioned that 'refugees are influencing each and every ministry'.<sup>65</sup> As such, from Christophersen's research, interviewed government officials affirmed that there is a problem with organisation, as the Syrian refugees consume a lot of Lebanese resources.<sup>66</sup>

Nonetheless, while policy makers have stressed the effect of the refugee presence on Lebanon's resources and economic hardship, 'analysts have decried the Lebanese state's disengagement from infrastructure and social reforms'.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, in her research Fakhoury concludes that it is the political leadership in Lebanon that has 'instrumentalized the Syrian refugee file for political gains' and 'with a pretext to downgrade promises of structural reform'.<sup>68</sup> Hence, this would suggest that holding the government responsible for the lack of structural reform includes critical reconsideration of the government's narrative concerning the threat of refugees.

<sup>61</sup> Yassin (n 28) 56.

<sup>62</sup> Ferris and Kirişci (n 11) 60.

<sup>63</sup> Baylouny and Klingseis (n 23) 104.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid* 110.

<sup>65</sup> Christophersen (n 24) 25.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* 26.

<sup>67</sup> T Fakhoury, 'Governance Strategies and Refugee Response: Lebanon in the Face of Syrian Displacement' (2017) 49 *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 681, 690.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid* 693.

## 3.

## LEBANESE PROTESTS

Thursday 17 October 2019 marked the start of what was seen as a new wave of protests in Lebanon. It is also referred to as the Lebanese revolution, *thawra*, or uprising, *intifada*. The label of *thawra* is one carried particularly by protesters who are calling for an overthrow of the regime. Hence, before one can speak of a Lebanese revolution, an overthrow of the political establishment needs to succeed.<sup>69</sup> Since the protesters have not succeeded in this effort (yet), the decision to refer to the protest movement as the October uprising has been taken. Nonetheless, when using Aberle's categorisation of social movements, the Lebanese protests fit the definition of revolutionary social movements since they advocate for radical changes at a group or societal level.<sup>70</sup> A proposal for regressive tax reforms was perceived as the initial spark causing people to take to the streets.<sup>71</sup> This tax proposal followed an earlier introduced set of austerity measures as Lebanon's economy was deteriorating. Among the tax reforms was a proposal for taxing the internet-based calling services of WhatsApp and Facebook. The fact that Lebanon has one of the highest prices for phone service worldwide is a known frustration among the population and has been a previous cause for activism.<sup>72</sup> Thus the combination of an impending financial

<sup>69</sup> WW Sokoloff, *Confrontational Citizenship: Reflections on Hatred, Rage, Revolution, and Revolt* (State University of New York Press 2017).

<sup>70</sup> DF Aberle, *The Peyote Religion Among the Navaho* (University of Oklahoma Press 1991).

<sup>71</sup> Amnesty International, 'Lebanon Protests Explained' (*Amnesty International*, 17 January 2020) <[www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>72</sup> L Bitar, 'Why Boycott Lebanon's Mobile Phone Operators, Alfa and Touch?' (*SMEX*, 5 January 2017) <<https://smex.org/why-boycott-lebanons-mobile-phone-operators-alfa-and-touch/>> accessed 5 October 2021.

crisis with a build-up of frustration concerning the government's failure in providing basic service came together in the response to the WhatsApp tax proposal.<sup>73</sup>

Although the WhatsApp tax is widely cited as the cause of the protests, there was more at play under the surface. Next to a failure in providing basic services, ranging from electricity to clean water to efficient garbage disposal, the government also faced criticism concerning the rampant corruption affecting the country. On 17 October the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released a report where 'governance weaknesses and a high level of corruption in Lebanon' were named as major impediments to economic improvements.<sup>74</sup> This report came at a time when Lebanon was already in an economic crisis, with an economic growth of only 0.2% in 2018, its public debt being the third highest worldwide and unemployment at 20%, youth unemployment even higher at 30%.<sup>75</sup> This followed years of neoliberal policies further consolidating a significant socio-economic gap among the Lebanese populace.

On 18 October, then Prime Minister Saad Hariri came with his initial response offering the government a 72-hour deadline to come up with a plan for reforms.<sup>76</sup> What followed was an economic plan intended to respond to the protesters' grievances.<sup>77</sup> While this plan included various reforms aiming to address the electricity sector, promises of no new taxes on individuals, lower salaries for government officials including high-ranking ones, among other things, it did not refer to the corruption of politicians.<sup>78</sup> The loss of trust in the government and lack of willingness

<sup>73</sup> K Chehayeb and A Sewell, 'Why Protesters in Lebanon Are Taking to the Streets' (*Foreign Policy*, 2019) <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/02/lebanon-protesters-movement-streets-explainer/>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>74</sup> International Monetary Fund, *Lebanon: 2019 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; Informational Annex; and Statement by the Executive Director for Lebanon* (International Monetary Fund 2019) <<http://elibrary.imf.org/view/IMF002/28437-9781513517049/28437-9781513517049/28437-9781513517049.xml>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>75</sup> H Sullivan, 'The Making of Lebanon's October Revolution' (*The New Yorker*, 2019) <[www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-making-of-lebanons-october-revolution](http://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-making-of-lebanons-october-revolution)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>76</sup> E Francis and S Nakhoul, 'Lebanon's Hariri Gives Government 72-Hour Deadline to Act Amid Protests' (*Reuters*, 18 October 2019) <[www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-protests-hariri-idUSKBN1WX21U](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-protests-hariri-idUSKBN1WX21U)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>77</sup> L Fakhri, 'Lebanon Plan to Address Protest Grievances Falls Short' (*Human Rights Watch*, 21 October 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/21/lebanon-plan-address-protest-grievances-falls-short](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/21/lebanon-plan-address-protest-grievances-falls-short)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

on behalf of the government to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions thus led to a refusal of the plan by those out on the streets. It took around two weeks of protesting when Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation on 29 October, and thus as constitutionally outlined also the resignation of his government. Notwithstanding this, the protests call for more systematic changes in various fields, hence the new government under Hassan Diab has not shown to be sufficient and protests continue. This government was installed after a caretaker government had bridged the gap between Hariri's resignation and Diab's nomination. This nomination was quickly denounced as protesters returned to the streets, for example singing a song with the lyrics 'helo ho, hela ho, hela ho. They brought in Hassan Diab and we will bring him down'.<sup>79</sup> Initially Hassan Diab was proposed as a technocrat in an effort to win support from the protesters.<sup>80</sup> Yet he was countered with opposition due to his previous experience as minister of education and because his support came from Hezbollah and allies.<sup>81</sup> Soon after assuming office the COVID-19 pandemic and financial crisis struck, further challenging Diab's government as protests continued.<sup>82</sup>

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs performed a mapping of the demands voiced in the October uprising by compiling the demands of 51 groups through a desk research. What followed from this research project are the following demands, split up in the themes of political, governance, economic and social and environmental.

<sup>79</sup> T Azhari, 'Lebanese President Asks Hassan Diab to Form Government' (*Al Jazeera*, 19 December 2019) <[www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/19/lebanese-president-asks-hassan-diab-to-form-government](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/19/lebanese-president-asks-hassan-diab-to-form-government)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>80</sup> K Chehayeb, 'Hassan Diab: The Man Charged with Pulling Lebanon from the Mire' (*Middle East Eye*, 20 December 2019) <[www.middleeasteye.net/news/hassan-diab-man-charged-pulling-lebanon-mire](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hassan-diab-man-charged-pulling-lebanon-mire)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>81</sup> F Anderson, "'Trust Is Lost': Protests Continue in Beirut as Lebanon Picks New PM' (*Middle East Eye*, 19 December 2019) <[www.middleeasteye.net/news/trust-lost-protests-continue-beirut-lebanon-picks-new-pm](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/trust-lost-protests-continue-beirut-lebanon-picks-new-pm)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Lebanon Protesters Call on Gov't to Resign amid Economic Crisis' (*Al Jazeera*, 13 June 2020) <[www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/13/lebanon-protesters-call-on-govt-to-resign-amid-economic-crisis](http://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/13/lebanon-protesters-call-on-govt-to-resign-amid-economic-crisis)> accessed 5 October 2021.

*Table 1. Demands of the October Uprising<sup>83</sup>*

<b>Political</b>	<b>Governance</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Social and environmental</b>
Resignation of government	Independent judiciary	Economic rescue plan (fiscal, monetary and tax reforms)	Reform of socio-economic policies (welfare provision, rights for vulnerable groups)
Formation of a rescue cabinet (independent, expert, transparent, with integrity)	Holding the corrupt accountable	Restructuring of national debt	Laws that ensure equal gender rights (right to pass on citizenship)
New electoral law (non-sectarian, equal representation)	Recovery of stolen funds	Reform of banking sector (lifting banking secrecy, taxing profits, resignation of Banque du Liban governor)	Policy reform on natural and built environment
Early parliamentary elections			
Transparent and productive public sector (safeguarding from clientelism and corruption, transparent public procurement)			

Because these demands are a summary of what many protest groups expressed, they tie together many different views but no hierarchy within demands is distinguished. While it is fair to say particularly the variety of themes is relevant to the protest, how widespread they are shared cannot be determined.

<sup>83</sup> Issam Fares Institute, 'Towards a Just Lebanon: Mapping the Demands and Goals of the October Uprising' (IFI Governance and Policy Lab 2020) [www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/infographics/2019-2020/20200110\\_towards\\_a\\_just\\_lebanon\\_mapping\\_the\\_demands\\_and\\_goals\\_of\\_the\\_october\\_uprising.pdf](http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/infographics/2019-2020/20200110_towards_a_just_lebanon_mapping_the_demands_and_goals_of_the_october_uprising.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021.

## 3.1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROTESTS

The Lebanese political background as well as previous occurrences of protests movements offer necessary insights into understanding the latest uprising. The political establishment of Lebanon is largely defined by its confessional power-sharing system. It is these sectarian affiliations in politics in combination with clientelism that causes confessionalism to take centre-stage in the protests' criticism of Lebanese politics. Political clientelism can be defined as 'the distribution of selective benefits to individuals or clearly defined groups in exchange for political support'.<sup>84</sup> In Lebanon this is particularly apparent as a relationship between a *zaim* or political leader and their constituents. A society marked by deep political cleavages has been known to be a conducive environment for clientelism to thrive in.<sup>85</sup> Hence political power in Lebanon was allocated based on the consociational power-sharing principles alongside clientelism.<sup>86</sup> Besides this clientelist system preventing a transparent and representative democratic system from developing, there are further implications. In Lebanon the 'political organizations with sectarian orientations play a crucial role in meeting the basic needs of the population'.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to this, the protests call for a system where provision in line with the basic needs of the population is not reliant on sectarian identity or political preference.

This also offers the context within which the protests arose. The lack of trust in the government derives from a wider context of the government's failure in not only tackling corruption, but also various human rights abuses. The panoply of issues include the still unknown fate of the estimated 1700 Lebanese that 'disappeared' during the civil war, abuse of women, children in school, discrimination of the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and queer (LGTBQ) community and migrant domestic workers, and the occurrence of torture and death while in

<sup>84</sup> J Hopkin, 'Conceptualizing Political Clientelism: Political Exchange and Democratic Theory' (APSA annual meeting 2006) 2.

<sup>85</sup> LF Medina and SC Stokes, 'Monopoly and Monitoring: An Approach to Political Clientelism' in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I Wilkinson (eds), *Patrons, Clients, and Policies* (Cambridge UP 2007).

<sup>86</sup> D Corstange, *The Price of a Vote in the Middle East: Clientelism and Communal Politics in Lebanon and Yemen* (Cambridge UP 2016).

<sup>87</sup> M Cammett and S Issar, 'Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: Sectarianism and the Logics of Welfare Allocation in Lebanon' (2010) 62 *World Politics* 381, 382.

judicial custody.<sup>88</sup> Therefore it falls short to label the protests as unexpected, because the build-up of frustration can be easily identified. By delving into the direct context surrounding the October uprising as well as looking into previous protests working with similar demands it becomes apparent the protest's demands for change did not arise out of nowhere.

A direct cause of decline in trust in the government prior to the protests was the forest fires that broke out on 13 October 2019 in the Mount Lebanon regions. Since these wildfires were the worst Lebanon has ever experienced, they exposed the government's lack of preparedness to handle natural disasters like this one.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore a direct cause of the forest fires as a recurring disaster is the neglect to implement preventive measures.<sup>90</sup> Yet civil society turned out to be a crucial actor in countering the fires and volunteers from throughout the country went to help those affected by the fires.<sup>91</sup> In stark contrast to this solidarity from within Lebanese society, the fires were employed by politicians using sectarian language as they wondered about whether victims of the fires had been of certain sectarian groups.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the government's failure in implementing preventive measures to the

<sup>88</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Unequal and Unprotected' (*Human Rights Watch*, 19 January 2015) <[www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws](http://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, 'Lebanon: Migrant Worker's Abuse Account' (*Human Rights Watch*, 6 April 2018) <[www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/06/lebanon-migrant-workers-abuse-account](http://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/06/lebanon-migrant-workers-abuse-account)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, 'Lebanon: School Staff Beating Children' (*Human Rights Watch*, 13 May 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/13/lebanon-school-staff-beating-children](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/13/lebanon-school-staff-beating-children)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, 'Lebanon: End Systemic Violence Against Transgender Women' (*Human Rights Watch*, 3 September 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/03/lebanon-end-systemic-violence-against-transgender-women](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/03/lebanon-end-systemic-violence-against-transgender-women)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, 'Lebanon: Judiciary Ignoring 2017 Anti-Torture Law' (*Human Rights Watch*, 19 September 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/19/lebanon-judiciary-ignoring-2017-anti-torture-law](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/19/lebanon-judiciary-ignoring-2017-anti-torture-law)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, 'Lebanon: Spate of Free Speech Prosecutions' (*Human Rights Watch*, 12 March 2020) <[www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/12/lebanon-spate-free-speech-prosecutions](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/12/lebanon-spate-free-speech-prosecutions)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>89</sup> T Azhari, 'Lebanon Wildfires: Hellish Scenes in Mountains South of Beirut' (*Al Jazeera*, 16 October 2019) <[www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/16/lebanon-wildfires-hellish-scenes-in-mountains-south-of-beirut/](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/16/lebanon-wildfires-hellish-scenes-in-mountains-south-of-beirut/)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 'Forest Fires in Lebanon: A Recurring Disaster' (American University Beirut 2019) <[www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/infographics/2019-2020/20191220\\_october\\_forest\\_fires.pdf](http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/infographics/2019-2020/20191220_october_forest_fires.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>91</sup> T Azhari, "It Was Like Judgment Day": Lebanese Devastated by Wildfires' (*Al Jazeera*, 17 October 2019) <[www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/17/it-was-like-judgment-day-lebanese-devastated-by-wildfires](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/17/it-was-like-judgment-day-lebanese-devastated-by-wildfires)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

yearly flooding in the country at the start of December 2019 further highlighted their mismanagement. Yet even amid flooding and heavy rain protesters remained in their encampments at protest sites.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.2. LEBANON'S PROTEST REPERTOIRES

Albeit not the main reason, the WhatsApp-tax proposal turned out to be the last straw for the Lebanese people. As a result a new social movement arose comprising people from all parts of Lebanese society. Following Tarrow's definition of social movements as 'collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities', the October uprising fits the mould.<sup>94</sup> The common purposes concern the demands of the protests. At the top of the list is a change in government towards a political system that is not based on consociationalism, or power-sharing along confessional lines. Further demands are plentiful, as can be seen from the overview of demands included in Appendix 1. A reason for this wide range of demands is the diversity in participants of the protests.

What distinguishes the October uprising from earlier protests in Lebanon are the identities of those leading the protests. Whereas the 2005 protests against the Syrian occupation were led by political parties and the 2015 protests against the garbage crisis were spearheaded by civil society groups, the October uprising is decentralised and a real grassroots movement.<sup>95</sup> One of the most frequently mentioned features of the composition of those protesting is that they are leaderless and diverse. On the one hand this diversity refers to the political sectarian identities in the country, where from every sect people went out to the streets. On the other hand, the protesters are also said to be diverse in the sense that they include 'unemployed youth, frustrated civil servants,

<sup>93</sup> Associated Press, 'Heavy Rain Causes Floods, Paralyzes Lebanon's Capital' (*VOAnews*, 9 December 2019) <[www.voanews.com/middle-east/heavy-rain-causes-floods-paralyzes-lebanons-capital](http://www.voanews.com/middle-east/heavy-rain-causes-floods-paralyzes-lebanons-capital)> accessed 5 October 2021; F Anderson, 'Lebanese Counting the Cost after Huge Flooding in Beirut' (*Middle East Eye*, 9 December 2019) <[www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanese-counting-cost-after-huge-flooding-beirut](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanese-counting-cost-after-huge-flooding-beirut)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>94</sup> S Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2nd edn, Cambridge UP 1998).

<sup>95</sup> A Sleiman, 'A Moment for Change: The Lebanese Uprisings of 2019' (Democracy Reporting International 2019).

university and school students and middle-class business people'.<sup>96</sup> As such, the people protesting for change are seen to supersede not only religious distinctions but also age, gender and class differences.<sup>97</sup> A particular example where national unity was put at the forefront of the protests was on Sunday 27 October when a human chain was formed running from the north to south of the country.<sup>98</sup>

Very often the presence of women at the forefront of the protests is highlighted in international media.<sup>99</sup> What played a particular role in this was 'the image of a woman kicking a minister's armed guard' that went viral and became an icon of the protests.<sup>100</sup> Later on also the slogan 'the revolution is female' or *Al Thawra Ontha* gained traction particularly by feminist groups in the protests.<sup>101</sup> The role of women in the uprising is combined with the environmentalist agenda in the creation of the statues of a female carrying the Lebanese flag that were both put up in Tripoli's Al Nour Square and Beirut's Martyrs' Square, two important protest sites in the country.<sup>102</sup>

Elements pointed out above can be better understood in the framework of social movements as put forward by the sociologist Charles Tilly. The collective action that constitutes the October uprising works with 'repertoires of contention'.<sup>103</sup> These can be better understood as the activities or call for actions performed within the protests. The

<sup>96</sup> Z Karam, 'AP Explains: Lebanon's Protests Could Head into Dark Turn' (*AP NEWS*, 13 November 2019) <<https://apnews.com/article/a04f393a2d764cbcbc3608353deb45a4>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>97</sup> R Collard, 'Lebanon's Protests Are Leaderless. That May Be Their Strength' (*Foreign Policy*, 2019) <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/25/lebanon-protests-michel-aoun-corruption-mismanagement/>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Agence France-Presse, 'Protesters Form Human Chain across Lebanon' (*The Guardian*, 27 October 2019) <[www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/27/lebanon-protesters-form-human-chain-across-entire-country](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/27/lebanon-protesters-form-human-chain-across-entire-country)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, 'In Lebanon, the Revolution Is a Woman' (*WILPF*, December 2019) <[www.wilpf.org/in-lebanon-the-revolution-is-a-woman/](http://www.wilpf.org/in-lebanon-the-revolution-is-a-woman/)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>100</sup> C Wilson, J Zabaneh and R Dore-Weeks, 'Understanding the Role of Women and Feminist Actors in Lebanon's 2019 Protests' (UN Women 2019) 4 <[www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2019/12/gendering%20lebanons%202019%20protests.pdf?la=en&vs=2300](http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2019/12/gendering%20lebanons%202019%20protests.pdf?la=en&vs=2300)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>101</sup> S Khalil, "'The Revolution Is Female": Why Feminist Issues Are Driving Lebanon's Protests' (*TheNewArab*, 7 November 2019) <<https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/why-feminist-issues-are-driving-lebanons-protests>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>102</sup> M Zakhour, 'The Bride of Lebanon's Revolution Has Its Own Statue Now' (*The961*, 31 December 2019) <[www.the961.com/the-bride-of-lebanons-revolution-has-its-own-statue-now/](http://www.the961.com/the-bride-of-lebanons-revolution-has-its-own-statue-now/)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>103</sup> C Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Routledge 2019) 4.

protests took shape as a civil disobedience campaign consisting of various activities.<sup>104</sup> On 17 October, Lihaqqi, a political group active in the protests, sent out the following message; 'Let us take action against the unfair taxes! To Riad al-Solh Square today (17 October) at 6 p.m., to foil the government's efforts to pass unfair taxes on telecom, gas and others'.<sup>105</sup> Following this the first road blocks of what become the October uprising were put in place and many people took to the street. The same night 'two Syrian workers died when the building they were sleeping in was set ablaze', becoming the first victims of the revolution with more to follow.<sup>106</sup>

Throughout the protests various repertoires of contention were employed. From blocking roads to sit-ins at political and financial institutions or homes of political leaders, but also 'graffiti deploring corruption and the political economy of Lebanon's post-war order' or organising discussion groups.<sup>107</sup> Besides this, many efforts were made at reclaiming public spaces in a country where a lot has been privatised. This included not only reclaiming cultural public spaces, but also saw a rise of guerrilla foresters or sustainability activists attempting to bring more green spaces to particularly Beirut and to promote recycling on protest grounds.<sup>108</sup> Examples of these reclaimed public spaces are most notably 'The Egg', being an old abandoned movie theatre or the Grand Theatre of Beirut.<sup>109</sup> Concerns for waste management show a link to the 2015 garbage crisis, where people took to the streets in criticising

<sup>104</sup> S El Deeb, 'Lebanese Block Roads as Mass Demonstrations Enter 10th Day' (*AP NEWS*, 26 October 2019) <<https://apnews.com/article/336c8d5615584c1ab90d80eb5ee443bb>> accessed 5 October 2021; H Yassine, 'The Revolution Enters Its Next Stage with Massive Civil Disobedience' (*The961*, 7 November 2019) <[www.the961.com/the-revolution-enters-its-next-stage-with-massive-civil-disobedience/](http://www.the961.com/the-revolution-enters-its-next-stage-with-massive-civil-disobedience/)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Sullivan (n 73).

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> T Fakhoury, 'The Unmaking of Lebanon's Sectarian Order? The October Uprising and Its Drivers' (2017) 2 <[www.academia.edu/41218558/The\\_Unmaking\\_of\\_Lebanons\\_Sectarian\\_Order\\_The\\_October\\_Uprising\\_and\\_its\\_Drivers](http://www.academia.edu/41218558/The_Unmaking_of_Lebanons_Sectarian_Order_The_October_Uprising_and_its_Drivers)> accessed 5 October 2021; A Naamani, 'Lebanese Youth Are Reclaiming Public Spaces with Arts and Dialogue' (*International Alert*, 20 November 2019) <[www.international-alert.org/blogs/lebanese-youth-are-reclaiming-public-spaces-arts-and-dialogue](http://www.international-alert.org/blogs/lebanese-youth-are-reclaiming-public-spaces-arts-and-dialogue)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>108</sup> F Anderson, 'Meet the "Guerrilla Foresters" Trying to Bring Green Spaces Back to Beirut' (*Middle East Eye*, 5 November 2019); B Zaza, 'Meet the Eco-Warriors Cleaning up after Lebanon's Protests' (*GulfNews*, 27 October 2019) <<https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/meet-the-eco-warriors-cleaning-up-after-lebanons-protests-1.67418113>> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>109</sup> W Sinno, 'How People Reclaimed Public Spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising' (2020) 5 *The Journal of Public Space* 1

the government's waste management.<sup>110</sup> All these acts constitute forms of contentious politics, as they intend to disrupt in order to activate change. On the one hand, repertoires of contention can be successful when they are familiar and therefore shared among many groups. An example of this in Lebanon can be the use of roadblocks. On the other hand, innovation in repertoires of protest activities can be more successful by being unexpected or generating more attention because of the novelty.

A final element in Tilly's definition is the use of WUNC displays, referring to Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment. Applying this to the Lebanese case shows its applicability clearly. The overarching demand concerns improvements for all layers of society, who all suffer in various degrees from the systematic corruption coming from the political establishment. The light shed on the participation of families, religious figures or women in specific emphasises the worthiness of the cause. Unity is by far what sets the October uprising apart from other political activities where it would show that sectarian divisions do not only concern politics, but are interwoven through the society's fabric. Numbers have been difficult to estimate, but especially in the first weeks grew quickly to hundreds of thousands of protesters out on the streets. Commitment has been tested time and again by obstacles related to flooding, counter-revolutionaries and subsequent risk of violence, financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the different obstacles required different solutions, the protests are still ongoing and changing forms at the time of writing.

<sup>110</sup> P Kantarjian, 'Recycling in Lebanon: A Vital Step in Subduing Ongoing Garbage Crisis' ([annahar.com](http://annahar.com), 10 November 2019) <[www.annahar.com/english/article/1065666-recycling-in-lebanon-a-vital-step-in-subduing-ongoing-garbage-crisis](http://www.annahar.com/english/article/1065666-recycling-in-lebanon-a-vital-step-in-subduing-ongoing-garbage-crisis)> accessed 5 October 2021.

4.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCHING  
PROTESTS

The primary purpose of this research is to delve into the demands of the Lebanese protests in order to understand the place of refugees within their host society. Hence this research starts from the assumption that a public uprising or mobilisation can tell us something not only about the direct topics covered within the demands, but also about issues beyond the scope of protester's demands. One of these could concern a society's perception towards the Other. Syrian refugees in Lebanon offer an insightful case study, as Lebanon has been the country with the highest number of refugees per capita for multiple years, at the time of writing.

Lebanon's history in hosting refugees has led to ample research on the perception of refugees by host communities, as evident in the literature review of this study. The Lebanese protests provide an interesting new phenomenon, the place of refugees within which being under-researched as of now. Taking the existing research as a starting point, the methodology section outlines how the Lebanese protests are taken as treatment to the existing rhetoric on refugees to assess whether there is a different perception of refugees within the protests. The theoretical framework put forward here explains the relation between protests and refugees, even without their direct participation in the protests under consideration.

4.1. ACTIVISM RESEARCHED FROM WITHIN

Why activism within the Lebanese protests is taken as a focal point in studying the perception of Syrian refugees is based on Carmen Geha's work in civil society research. At this point in time, it is too early to research the extent to which the Lebanese protests succeeded

in establishing a sustainable political change, apart from pushing for change of the Hariri government. Instead, Geha's work puts forward that civil society research ought not to be concerned solely with whether civil society 'can achieve democracy or can topple regimes'.<sup>111</sup> Researching the protests from the viewpoint of civil society activists offers insights into claims made which could mirror the political reality and frames of refugee hosting present among protesters. This is more fruitful than an analysis of the political landscape in Lebanon, as the level of democracy can be questioned. Geha concludes that there is empirical validity to analysing civil society 'through the lens of the activists themselves' and this should serve as a starting point to truly understanding the strategies and rhetoric employed.<sup>112</sup> It is Asef Bayat's understanding of social movements which is used to research the perception of activists. His study on political change is based on the assumption that the presence of refugees is considered in some sense by protesters, regardless of the refugees' participation in the protests. Bayat employs the label of 'non-movements', which is concerned with the 'art of presence'. This 'art of presence' stipulates that the mere presence of Syrians in Lebanese public spaces causes them to be considered in any call for political change. Traditionally, 'street politics' views urban public spaces as a theatre, in which the people communicate their discontent through disruption. Yet Bayat emphasises another dimension of 'street politics' as 'not only [a place] where people express grievances, but also where they forge identities, enlarge solidarities and extend their protest beyond their immediate circles to include the unknown, the strangers'.<sup>113</sup> Beirut thus offers the prime example of what Bayat calls 'everyday cosmopolitanism', as the city is not only a site where wealth, power and privilege clash with stark opposites, it also offers a place where Lebanese citizens and refugees mix and mingle.<sup>114</sup> Hence in Lebanon, the country with the greatest number of refugees per capita worldwide, the enlarging solidarities to those encountered on the streets can likely also touch refugees. Vice versa, refugees living side by side with Lebanese citizens are likely to be acknowledged as the country's

<sup>111</sup> C Geha, 'Understanding Arab Civil Society: Functional Validity as the Missing Link' (2019) 46 *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 498.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid* 512.

<sup>113</sup> A Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam UP 2010) 12.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid* 13.

reality. It is the mere 'physical, social and cultural presence' of refugees over the years that impinged on the larger Lebanese society's call for change.<sup>115</sup> Deets also hinted at this in his research on civic and sectarian identities within Beirut's local politics, by emphasising how shared urban experiences, for example over the state's failure in providing good public infrastructure, can serve as a basis for 'common frames and networks' including all those affected, thus including refugees as well as Lebanese citizens.<sup>116</sup>

#### 4.2. STUDYING PERCEPTION

While at first Lebanon was praised for its hospitable nature in hosting such big waves of refugees, the increasing strain on the country's resources led to more critical perceptions of refugees. Combining various theories on the conditions for immigrants to provoke local opposition, Hopkins developed the 'politicized places hypothesis'.<sup>117</sup> This hypothesis proposes that hostile political reactions are most likely to occur when a sudden influx is combined with a 'salient national rhetoric' that reinforces a sense of threat.<sup>118</sup> Literature on racial or ethnic threats puts forward various conditions for out-groups or 'Others' to be perceived negatively or even threatening.<sup>119</sup> These conditions can range from competition over scarce resources to political competition based on identity politics and prejudices. Filindra and Pearson-Merkowitz conclude that 'geosocial exposure' to migrants or an out-group does not suffice in explaining the perception of immigrants as a threat.<sup>120</sup> Instead, it is the combination of immigrants with fear for the future of

<sup>115</sup> Bayat (n 113) 15.

<sup>116</sup> S Deets, 'Consociationalism, Clientelism, and Local Politics in Beirut: Between Civic and Sectarian Identities' (2018) 24 *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 133, 135.

<sup>117</sup> DJ Hopkins, 'Politicized Places: Explaining Where and When Immigrants Provoke Local Opposition' (2010) 104 *American Political Science Review* 40.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> L Quillian, 'Prejudice as a Response to Perceived Group Threat: Population Composition and Anti-Immigrant and Racial Prejudice in Europe' (1995) 60 *American Sociological Review* 586; JC Dixon, 'The Ties That Bind and Those That Don't: Toward Reconciling Group Threat and Contact Theories of Prejudice' (2006) 84 *Social Forces* 2179; D Aksoy, 'The Flag or the Pocketbook: To What Are Immigrants a Threat' (2012) 50 *International Migration* 28; A Filindra and S Pearson-Merkowitz, 'Together in Good Times and Bad? How Economic Triggers Condition the Effects of Intergroup Threat: Together in Good Times and Bad' (2013) 94 *Social Science Quarterly* 1328.

<sup>120</sup> Filindra and Pearson-Merkowitz *ibid* 1341.

the economy.<sup>121</sup> This ties in with Hopkins' 'politicized places hypothesis' which relies on two core assertions. Firstly, it is not the level of heterogeneity in a community, but the changes in this level that matter.<sup>122</sup> Secondly, for a change to resonate with a host community as a change in politics, certain frames are needed which tell people 'what the problem is and how to think about it'.<sup>123</sup> Hopkins identifies two sources of such frames, being 'individuals' ideologies and long-standing beliefs' or the mass media.<sup>124</sup> Yet it could be argued there are more sources framing how people perceive immigrants. As put forward by Carl Schmitt, 'the sovereign is he who decides on the exception'.<sup>125</sup> Initially this applies to a country's state of emergency, but also implies it is the state's narrative holding the power to ascertain who belongs to the national community and who does not. The rise of populism is generally defined by a political 'claim to represent the will of the people versus some "Other"'.<sup>126</sup> Margalit identifies a common causal factor for populism to be rising, which is the economic insecurity whereby immigration is an often-used narrative as causing this economic malaise.<sup>127</sup> These theories seem to match with the Lebanese context, as the influx of particularly Syrian refugees in Lebanon coincides with a build-up in frustration over scarce public resources, political competition based on the cleavages in sectarian identities and a salient national rhetoric by the political elite, blaming refugees.

This framing or labelling of the 'Other' has consequences for 'how their presence is understood by others in the community, and what type of rights and protections [they] may have access to'.<sup>128</sup> Janmyr and Mourad delve into the implications of what labels are defining the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. They distinguish between

<sup>121</sup> Filindra and Pearson-Merkowitz (n 119) 1341.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> DR Kinder, 'Communication and Opinion' (1998) 1 *Annual Review of Political Science* 167, 170.

<sup>124</sup> Hopkins (n 115).

<sup>125</sup> C Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press 2005).

<sup>126</sup> Y Margalit, 'Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered' (2019) 33 *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 152.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> M Janmyr and L Mourad, 'Modes of Ordering: Labelling, Classification and Categorization in Lebanon's Refugee Response' [2018] *Journal of Refugee Studies* 544, 545 <<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/31/4/544/4792968?redirectedFrom=fulltext>>.

labelling at the international, national and local level. These levels influence each another particularly through cooperation between international, national and local institutions. For example, aid targeted at refugees could go through national governments and implemented at local levels, where host communities notice a distinction between them and the Syrian refugees consequently. Although initially intended to serve bureaucratic needs, Zetter points out how the label of refugee 'gradually assumes a distinctive, politicized identity'.<sup>129</sup> 'The dilemma of recognition' as described by De Zwart is based on policies intended to reduce group inequality by recognising 'caste, ethnic, and racial distinctions'.<sup>130</sup> De Zwart points out the risk that these distinctions may 'promote ethnic conflict, create vested interest in group distinctions, [and] diminish public support for redistribution'.<sup>131</sup> 'The refugee "problem" is, first and foremost, one of categorisation, of making distinctions.'<sup>132</sup> On the one hand this label might bring with it benefits and access to resources as the label allows those conforming to it 'to pursue their own agendas and interests'.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, the creation and application of this label is non-participatory and potentially leads to further stigmatisation and alienation.<sup>134</sup> Janmyr and Mourad point out how this issue is particularly salient concerning Syrians in Lebanon. Hence testing whether there is a significant change in the way refugees are referred to or framed in the protests in comparison to state or public rhetoric prior to the protests offers insights into the extent to which refugee agendas and interests are included.

The viewpoint in this analysis is taken from the theoretical assumptions outlined above. In short, these assumptions focus on the rhetoric of the protests as capable of showing a potential change of perception towards Syrian refugees. Therefore, the particular variables sought after in this research are what activists understand inclusion to mean and who they perceive to be included in the call for change within the protests. By

<sup>129</sup> R Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity' (1991) 4 *Journal of Refugee Studies* 39, 55.

<sup>130</sup> F De Zwart, 'The Dilemma of Recognition: Administrative Categories and Cultural Diversity' (2005) 34 *Theory and Society* 138.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> E Haddad, 'Who Is (Not) a Refugee?' in E Haddad (ed), *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge UP 2008) <[www.cambridge.org/core/books/refugee-in-international-society/who-is-not-a-refugee/779D6EF13C4F251CB070ECD3CBD81D04](http://www.cambridge.org/core/books/refugee-in-international-society/who-is-not-a-refugee/779D6EF13C4F251CB070ECD3CBD81D04)>.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* 19.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

analysing the responses related to these variables, insight is gathered into the representation of refugees within the protests' rhetoric. The literature review synthesises existing literature to inform the hypotheses on how Syrian refugees are perceived by different strata of Lebanese society prior to the protests, which will then be tested on participants in the protests. Through this, insight is gained into whether the protests mark a change in refugee perception.

The biggest limitation of this theoretical framework is the blind spot for all the Lebanese who were not represented in the protests, nor for the perspective of refugees themselves on how they are perceived. This study thus does not intend to explain or predict whether Lebanese state's policy or even the population's stance towards the hosting of refugees will change after the protests. Rather, it is limited to investigating claims made within the protest's discourse, working from the assumption that this could mirror Lebanese public opinion better than government policy can.

## 5.

## METHODOLOGY

The novelty of the Lebanese protests means there is little to no academic research published on the topic, its causes and its consequences as of now. Hence, the research method of process tracing can make cogent contributions to the study of the protests and refugees in Lebanon. Using a within-case analysis of the Lebanese protests, based on qualitative data, allows for an analysis of the potential change occurring in the perception of refugees prior to the protests vis-à-vis the narrative within the protests. Collier defined process tracing as ‘the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator’.<sup>135</sup> These hypotheses are derived from the preliminary findings gathered from the literature review. Albeit rather difficult to come to definitive eliminations of hypotheses in social sciences, the analysis employs tests for causal inference as presented by Bennett, Collier and Brady.<sup>136</sup> These help identify what processes were influential in shaping refugee perception within the protests. The following hypotheses will thus be tested in the discussion based on the gathered results:

- The government, not the refugees, is perceived as the main problem in the country.
- Protesters link refugees less to issues of public infrastructure, economy, security and politics, particularly the sectarian balance, than popular opinion would prior to the October uprising.

<sup>135</sup> D Collier, ‘Understanding Process Tracing’ (2011) 44 PS: Political Science & Politics 823.

<sup>136</sup> H Brady, D Collier and HE Brady, *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (2nd edn, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2010).

- The October uprising is not only about political but also social change and thus puts forward a more inclusive discourse towards vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as refugees, in contrast to the nationalistic discourse of elites in power.

The foundation of process tracing is meticulous description, as emphasised by Mahoney.<sup>137</sup> Aiming for thick description enables an analysis of what mechanisms are at play between the protests and the perceptions of refugees. Furthermore, there is a need for collecting large amounts of data from diverse sources, as one of the biggest pitfalls in process-tracing and causal-inference is the problem of missing variables.<sup>138</sup> Data collection will thus happen through a mixed-methods approach. Within the literature review an account of the protests is provided combining various sources with the researcher's observations from attending early protests. Particularly for the use of media sources, particular attention is required for potential biases. Secondly, elite interviewing is used to include insights from some of the most important political players in the protests. Whereas often elite interviewing in political science involves actors at the highest level of government, since the political event under consideration here is the Lebanese protests, the elite translate into prominent activists.<sup>139</sup> These interviews are of multiple uses apart from establishing what activists and their networks think, namely to 'corroborate what has been established from other sources' and to further reconstruct the protests in writing.<sup>140</sup>

As the aim of this process-tracing exercise is not to make generalisations about all participants in the protests, nor the entire Lebanese population or Syrian refugee community, purposive sampling is used to obtain highly specific information related to the protests and the narratives voiced within. The selection method of purposive sampling allows the researcher to identify which 'elites' to include.<sup>141</sup> This selection is based on criteria aiming to incorporate voices from the protests as diverse as possible. By using the researcher's personal

<sup>137</sup> J Mahoney, 'After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research' (2010) 62 *World Politics* 120.

<sup>138</sup> Collier (n 135) 828.

<sup>139</sup> O Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-Probability Sampling' (2007) 40 *PS: Political Science & Politics* 765.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

network and using the knowledge of academic experts on the Lebanese protests, the most appropriate sample of actors is identified.<sup>142</sup> Within the sampling, the focus is on covering a diversity in backgrounds and differing opinions rather than finding a consensus amidst the protesters. As such, the study sought for maximum variation cases within the scope of protesting activists.<sup>143</sup> Taking into account that there is no one leader able to represent all protesters, the sampling intends to include a diversity of opinions from different protest concentrations across the country. In order to ensure this, key informants are asked to place themselves within the protests by explaining what makes the group they represent different from other groups. As the sample was limited, this study bases itself on information oriented selection, meaning that 'cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content'.<sup>144</sup>

## 5.1 RESEARCH METHOD

With the purpose of answering the overall research question that asks to what extent the October uprising signifies a shift in the popular perception of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, some key sub-questions are identified. Based on these questions, as found below, the method of qualitative interviewing was concluded to be the most suitable data collection tool.

Key questions:

- What are the demands voiced in the Lebanese protests?
- How do these differ between participating protesters in various regions? What is the relation between the background of protesters and their view on refugees?
- What has been the protests' rhetoric about Syrian refugees?
- How are refugees framed within the protests? Are they singled out, not mentioned at all, included, or highlighted as special cases in need of extra protection?

<sup>142</sup> Tansey (n 139)..

<sup>143</sup> S Brinkmann, *Qualitative Interviewing* (OUP 2013) 58.

<sup>144</sup> B Flyvbjerg, 'Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research' (2006) 12 *Qualitative Inquiry* 219, 230.

In-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide are used to allow the respondents ‘to reflect on and even explore own ideas, to reveal not only strong views, but also worries, uncertainties – in a word, to engage human vulnerability’.<sup>145</sup>

Qualitative interviewing faces a widespread critique for the risk of being too subjective.<sup>146</sup> Nonetheless, since the topic of interest is related to human perception, and we are ‘linguistic creatures’ that voice perception through language, using conversation becomes the best method for understanding.<sup>147</sup>

As put forward by Atkinson and Silverman, people have become increasingly familiar with interviews ‘and their more or less standardized choreographies’ resulting in fewer interruptions in the conversations.<sup>148</sup> This can be a pity as it is those interruptions or pauses to think that can be the most interesting or refreshing parts of the interview, due to their uninhibitedness. Since this research deals with some experienced political activists, they have become accustomed to phrasing their views on the protests in a certain manner. A more constructionist view is thus taken that requires each interview to be analysed as situated within the activist’s group or network. The purpose of the interviews is thus to obtain ‘descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena’.<sup>149</sup>

When it comes to the first half of each interview, a phenomenological perspective is taken since the goal is to gather descriptions of how interviewees experience the protests and their demands. In that sense, the analytic approach taken is ‘interview-data-as-resource’, based on the belief that the interview can reflect the reality of the protests.<sup>150</sup> Understandably so, taking interviews as a reflection of the truth requires asking about specific experiences and detailed narratives of those. This distinction between ‘interview-data-as-resource’ and ‘interview-data-as-social-practice’ does not have to exclude each other and is combined

<sup>145</sup> D Yanow and P Schwartz-Shea (eds), *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (2nd edn, Routledge 2015) 118.

<sup>146</sup> Brinkmann (n 143) 4.

<sup>147</sup> S Mulhall, *The Conversation of Humanity* (University of Virginia Press 2007).

<sup>148</sup> P Atkinson and D Silverman, ‘Kundera’s Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self’ (1997) 3 *Qualitative Inquiry* 304.

<sup>149</sup> S Kvale and S Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (3rd edn, Sage Publications 2015) 3.

<sup>150</sup> Brinkmann (n 143) 37.

within this study's interviews.<sup>151</sup> Whereas the questions concerning the protests intend to accurately report what the protests are demanding, the questions concerning Syrian refugees and how they are framed within the protests concern a social practice orientation. Consequently, this requires an analysis that takes into account 'the socially situated and discursively constructed nature of speech events'.<sup>152</sup> Within this, reflexivity of the researcher is required. As the manner in which interviewees voice their views on the protests, but possibly even more so on Syrian refugees can be influenced by their view of the researcher.<sup>153</sup>

### 5.1.1. *Limitations*

A potential effect of being a non-Lebanese student could have been the fact that respondents went into more detail concerning the protests and Lebanese historical political context, based on an assumption that the researcher might not know certain details a Lebanese citizen would. Another effect of talking to a European concerning the topic of hosting Syrian refugees derives from the relationship between Lebanon and the international community. Certain sensitivities within Lebanese society can appear when focus is put on the refugees in the country without acknowledging the hardships that Lebanese citizens have to face. To prevent this issue from influencing interviewees' responses, the topic of refugees was only mentioned after the interview had gone into depth on the Lebanese protests.

Furthermore, extra attention was given to the interview technique as the use of online interviewing creates some different obstacles than would be the case for face-to-face interviews. Although the latter is generally accepted to be the best method of conducting qualitative interviews, studies show that they are only marginally superior to video calls 'in that interviewees said more' on sensitive issues.<sup>154</sup> Yet, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures online

<sup>151</sup> S Talmy, 'Qualitative Interviews in Applied Linguistics: From Research Instrument to Social Practice' (2010) 30 Annual Review of Applied Linguistics 128.

<sup>152</sup> J McGregor and J Fernández, 'Theorizing Qualitative Interviews: Two Autoethnographic Reconstructions' (2019) 103 The Modern Language Journal 227.

<sup>153</sup> S Mann, *The Research Interview: Reflective Practice and Reflexivity in Research Processes* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016).

<sup>154</sup> M Krouwel, K Jolly and S Greenfield, 'Comparing Skype (Video Calling) and in-Person Qualitative Interview Modes in a Study of People with Irritable Bowel Syndrome – an Exploratory Comparative Analysis' (2019) 19 BMC Medical Research Methodology 219.

interviews were opted for. This required ‘access to high-speed Internet, familiarity with online communication, and having digital literacy’, but this turned out not to be a problem for the selected sample.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, the lesser time and financial constraints in combination with overcoming geographical dispersion and physical mobility boundaries turned out to be beneficial in getting activists to accept to an interview.<sup>156</sup> The time of interviews ranged between 50 minutes to one and a half hours. They were recorded with consent of the interviewees, following which a transcription was made by the researcher. The language of most interviews was English, with the exception of two interviews, where a translator with a background in political science was used to ask the questions during the interview. Directly after, a translated transcription of this interview was made. As the other eight interviews took place in English, this meant the interviewees did not discuss in their mother tongue.

Following 17 October, violations of the right to freedom of expression have been increasing in Lebanon. Particularly when it comes to insulting specific politicians or defamation many activists, journalists and citizens have been facing increased risk of detention, interrogation and censorship.<sup>157</sup> As a consequence, contacting activists and getting them to agree to interviews meant they would have to accept additional risks.

<sup>155</sup> R Janghorban, RL Roudsari and A Taghipour, ‘Skype Interviewing: The New Generation of Online Synchronous Interview in Qualitative Research’ (2014) 9 *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 24152.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid* 1.

<sup>157</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Unequal and Unprotected’ (*Human Rights Watch*, 19 January 2015) <[www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws](http://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, ‘Lebanon: Migrant Worker’s Abuse Account’ (*Human Rights Watch*, 6 April 2018) <[www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/06/lebanon-migrant-workers-abuse-account](http://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/06/lebanon-migrant-workers-abuse-account)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, ‘Lebanon: School Staff Beating Children’ (*Human Rights Watch*, 13 May 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/13/lebanon-school-staff-beating-children](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/13/lebanon-school-staff-beating-children)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, ‘Lebanon: End Systemic Violence Against Transgender Women’ (*Human Rights Watch*, 3 September 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/03/lebanon-end-systemic-violence-against-transgender-women](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/03/lebanon-end-systemic-violence-against-transgender-women)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, ‘Lebanon: Judiciary Ignoring 2017 Anti-Torture Law’ (*Human Rights Watch*, 19 September 2019) <[www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/19/lebanon-judiciary-ignoring-2017-anti-torture-law](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/19/lebanon-judiciary-ignoring-2017-anti-torture-law)> accessed 5 October 2021; Human Rights Watch, ‘Lebanon: Spate of Free Speech Prosecutions’ (*Human Rights Watch*, 12 March 2020) <[www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/12/lebanon-spate-free-speech-prosecutions](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/12/lebanon-spate-free-speech-prosecutions)> accessed 5 October 2021; A Touma and M Zaghbour, ‘To Speak or Not to Speak: Tackling Recent Violations of Freedom of Expression in Lebanon’ (Policy Brief 1, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Politics 202 <[www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy-briefs/2019-2020/20200117\\_freedom\\_of\\_expression.pdf](http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy-briefs/2019-2020/20200117_freedom_of_expression.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021).

This might have limited the sample. Furthermore, extra guarantees to protect respondents anonymity are required. Therefore it was decided not to include the full transcriptions of the interviews.

### *5.1.2. Sample*

A total of ten activists were interviewed. The main criteria for selection were ensuring diversity particularly in regional background and connection to different protest groups. The activists thus originate from different regions in Lebanon and/or are active in different protests hotspots in the country. Consequently, they are supposed to be able to share insights on potential differences between regions. Out of the ten activists, there were three females interviewed. Furthermore, the groups they derive from differ in size, age and of course political vision. While the points expressed in the interviews are taken as personal opinions and should not be understood as representing the groups' formal standpoints, in some instances they were asked to share their group's position concerning various topics as well.

Activists related to the following groups were included: Marsad Shaabi, Massirat Watan, Lihaqqi, 'An Haqak Dafie, Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla (MMFD), The National Bloc, Binaa Dawla, Beirut Madinati and Saida Tantafed. Appendix 1 offers background to all groups and parties represented.

6.

RESULTS

In order to assess whether a shift can be observed in how refugees are considered in Lebanon, particularly within the October uprising, an in-depth understanding of the protests is needed. Within this section results will be drawn based on the data collected through the interviews performed for this study. As the October uprising is first and foremost unprecedented due to its magnitude, diversity and persistence in times of health and financial crises, it would be sold short by only zooming in on discourse concerning refugees. Hence, the first half of the interview allowed activists to share their experiences and perspective on the protests, the protesters and the demands voiced within. Through this process claims made were checked against regional differences. By doing so, it becomes possible to assess how widely shared certain perspectives are across regions and protest groups. What can be taken from the interviews are certain recurring themes that shape activists' understanding of the protests, their relevance in Lebanon and what the protests could mean for refugee hosting in the country. Both similarities and differences among responses will be highlighted. All in all, what is focussed on as such becomes a test as to whether a different and new value system follows from the protests and to what extent this value system also applies to non-Lebanese, or Syrian refugees, in particular.

6.1. THE OCTOBER UPRISING THROUGH THE EYES OF ACTIVISTS

Delving into activists' descriptions of 17 October allows for a better understanding of both the spark and background causes of the October uprising. This enables an explanation for how the wall of fear previously felt in Lebanon was demolished and why that happened during this

particular time period. Hence this section synthesises responses concerning the onset of the October uprising by sharing factors leading people out into the street and contrasting these to earlier protests.

Although the Lebanese protests get their name as October uprising from the date of 17 October 2019, respondents unequivocally emphasised how 17 October was not a starting point. Rather, it is seen as a continuation of many efforts for reform that preceded this date. Within a study on 'new' political groups that emerged before the 2018 parliamentary elections an overview is provided of the 'evolution of contemporary civil movements in Lebanon'.<sup>158</sup> The table below shows an overview of social movements in Lebanon over the years.

*Table 2. Historical overview of Lebanese social movements*

2005	Cedar revolution
2006	July war emergency responses
2008	'If you don't reunite, don't come back'
2011	Campaign for the downfall of the sectarian system
2013-14	Civil movement for accountability: take back parliament
2015	Civil movement in response to the garbage crisis
2016	Municipal elections and the 'Beirut Madinati' phenomenon
2018	Parliamentary elections
2019	October uprising

Although all interviewed activists seemed to agree that the state of the country, particularly the political confessional system, would not hold much longer, activists differed in when they expected the spark for change would occur. On the other hand, it is remarkable how many groups were already preparing for activities or warning something would happen long before 17 October.<sup>159</sup> As rumours of tax reforms spread, some activists from Saida Tantafed 'started going to the markets and the shops and to tell them that they need to be aware something is

<sup>158</sup> Z El Hélou, 'Lebanon's 2018 Elections: An Opportunity for New Political Actors?' (Lebanon Support 2018) 2 <[https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/electionsbpaper\\_newpoliticalactors\\_ls\\_online.pdf](https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/electionsbpaper_newpoliticalactors_ls_online.pdf)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>159</sup> The activist from Saida Tantafed noted that in Saida protests started 20 days prior to 17 October.

going to happen. They are going to be asking for extra taxes, you have to be careful'.<sup>160</sup>

In a similar vein, warning signs for the approaching financial crisis were shared earlier in advance. Activists both related and unrelated to MMFD referred to a press conference in October 2018 by MMFD that already announced an upcoming economic crisis and consequent collapse of the political system.<sup>161</sup> It was thus noted by the activist from 'An Haqak Dafie that 'start-ups and young businesses (...) felt there was an economic recession for a year at least and they were astonished that the central bank was saying all was fine'.<sup>162</sup>

Overall, the looming financial crisis was most frequently mentioned as causing the momentum for the uprising to start in October 2019. A telling parallel was drawn by the activist from MMFD by looking into Lebanon's history and the role of banks, 'during the days of the Lebanese war from 1975-1990, even during the Israeli invasion in 1982 which saw a huge level of violence, the banks never closed for a single day'.<sup>163</sup>

Consequently, the protests became something for the banks to hide behind as the financial system was no longer able to cope. Hence the financial crisis was a tell-tale sign for many that new protests would not stay away long.

Apart from the financial crisis in the country, various activists mentioned there were activities planned for the week of 17 October prior to the WhatsApp-tax being announced. Besides protests in Saida taking place 20 days before, also Marsad Shaabi and Lihaqqi were already organising activities that were overtaken by the sudden spark in protests after 17 October. Taking into account the wider context the country was in, the forest fires around Dammour in October were mentioned as an important spark. Leaving the government's failure in countering the widespread destruction of the fires to the side for a moment, an activist from Massirat Watan described the response to the fires as 'positive, it was something if you think of, you think that the continuation was

<sup>160</sup> Interview with activist, Saida Tantafed (online, 24 June 2020).

<sup>161</sup> S Al-Attar, 'Charbel Nahas : Lebanon is in a pre-crisis phase' (*Commerces du Levant*, 15 January 2019) <[www.lecommercedulevant.com/article/28809-charbel-nahas-lebanon-is-in-a-pre-crisis-phase](http://www.lecommercedulevant.com/article/28809-charbel-nahas-lebanon-is-in-a-pre-crisis-phase)> accessed 5 October 2021.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with activist, 'An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

<sup>163</sup> Interview with activist, MMFD (online, 10 June 2020).

coming and it could change'.<sup>164</sup> This concerns the solidarity among the population in particular.

Yet the translation of this sentiment into civil disobedience shows the desperation felt by the people. Under the hashtag #LebanonBurning images of both the destruction and the response by civilians was shared on social media and seen by many in the country. As a consequence, 17 October marked a sort of intersection, according to the Lihaqqi activist, '[t]he WhatsApp-tax contributed to the lack of trust of people in the government and the solidarity movement a day before in getting the fire down without any help from the government gave people this sense of unity and solidarity'.<sup>165</sup>

The frequently referred to WhatsApp tax is thus better understood as a catalyst that caused an explosion in protests following the accumulation of the pressure that the system was putting on people. The size and diversity of the October uprising can be seen in how widespread it was and the variety in frustrations expressed. Particularly the first two months were perceived extremely positive and full of hope. Yet this changed at the resignation of the Hariri government followed by the instalment of Hassan Diab. The protesters were diverse in nature and demands all along, finally having the chance to voice any frustrations, yet with the overarching focus on wanting the Hariri government to go and an independent government to be formed. An activist from Beirut Madinati regards the following government under Hassan Diab as a curveball, since it somewhat co-opted the protests call for an independent person, while in reality implemented more of the same political class according to some.<sup>166</sup> Next, it became more difficult for protest groups to effectively object to Hassan Diab and some momentum was lost. Still many demands and points of frustration remained, but according to this Beirut Madinati activist a clear 'theory for change' was lacking.<sup>167</sup> In the same vein, another activist from 'An Haqak Dafie voiced some reservations regarding the widespread nature of the protests. She pointed out how the wide scope of the protests right after the spark of 17 October mostly allowed people to voice some frustration, sometimes even without true hope change could succeed:

<sup>164</sup> Interview with activist, Massirat Watan (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>165</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>166</sup> Interview with activist, Beirut Madinati (online, 23 June 2020).

<sup>167</sup> Interview with activist, Beirut Madinati (online, 23 June 2020).

Because at the beginning everyone who was suffering from something wrote it down on a sign. It's okay, I think it's normal that people express their agony and their fears, but taking this out of the equation, I felt that something like this fear that people would not go on the street sort of disappeared, something was crossed, because people now felt they could go on the street and say what they want even though it might not lead anywhere.<sup>168</sup>

This exemplifies the description provided by an activist from Massirat Watan who defines 17 October as the moment the 'wall of fear' for people to say what they think was broken.<sup>169</sup> This particular activist related it to the make-up of the protesters being from a younger generation. Contrasting older generations with the younger generation that 'did not live with the fear of war, the sound of war and the smell of war' is what he perceives to be a major element shaping the priority of freedom and perspective of a better future in the protests.<sup>170</sup>

While generally the collapse of this wall of fear felt by the Lebanese population is referred to by activists as something very positive, the critical remark concerning how everybody was now able to say anything even without having the potential to lead anywhere is interesting to consider. It signifies the magnitude of the protests, not only in the amount of people joining but also in the size of topics covered. Likewise, when asking to point out differences between the October uprising and earlier protests this was a frequently referred to comment. While earlier protests such as the 2015 garbage crisis or the 2017 protests against tax reforms were very topical, the October uprising of 2019 is more encompassing.<sup>171</sup> At most the 2011 protests or uprising of dignity are compared to the 2019 uprising on the basis of demands. Yet the 2019 October uprising distinguishes itself on its grassroots nature. The protests are truly bottom-up with many individuals joining and finding groups while attending the protests. From the interviews it follows that many groups and networks popped up within the protests and coordination among them has been challenging. As a result, the clubs active in the protests were more diverse in nature. Moreover, an

<sup>168</sup> Interview with activist, 'An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

<sup>169</sup> Interview with activist, Massirat Watan (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>170</sup> Interview with activist, Massirat Watan (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>171</sup> E Francis, 'Hundreds Protest Lebanese Parliament's Proposed Tax Hikes' (*Reuters*, 19 March 2017) <[www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-protests-idUSKBN16Q0IG](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-protests-idUSKBN16Q0IG)> accessed 5 October 2021.

important change with earlier protests is the view that these protests are more decentralised and Beirut is not the only hotspot in the country. On the one hand, the October uprising gave birth to many new groups. On the other hand, maturity was also referred to as a change from earlier protest movements by an activist from the National Bloc. In several ways it shows that protest groups learned from earlier experiences. The Cedar Revolution of 2005 was called a deception, because they knew 'that the political system was just going to reproduce itself' said the Massirat Watan activist.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, it was mentioned that 2015 and 2017 were able to move some people away from their 'loyalty to political parties', yet 2019 'made much more people and political awareness was much higher and made people also aware of the root causes of their struggle', according to the activist from the Lebanese Communist Party.<sup>173</sup> Hence, it was said that now people do not focus on merely one topic, but more on underlying root causes. The National Bloc activist described this as follows, '[i]t's all the sectors, every single sector might have a crisis because of these current political elites and this current political club'.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, the main target was said to be the corruption and clientelism committed by the political club in power for years.

## 6.2. OVERVIEW OF DEMANDS

The demands of the protests inform not only what exact changes are envisioned by protesters, but can also tell us more of the mindset and underlying value system that made people go out. Without question the key demand was an end to the confessional system that allowed for the systemic corruption and clientelism in the country, because it is seen as the core of most problems faced in the country. When it comes to the more specific demands for change, or the proposed methods to realise this change, differences among groups come to the surface. These differences can tell us something about the composition of the protesters and where points for discussion or disagreement could surface. Therefore it is a relevant examination to make, as it defines the limits of the foreseen changes or the borders between groups.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with activist, Massirat Watan (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>173</sup> Interview with activist, LCP (online, 6 June 2020).

<sup>174</sup> Interview with activist, National Bloc (online, 12 June 2020).

The interviewed activists were requested to provide a top three of the most important demands voiced within the protest, based on their personal perspectives and network. Next, they were asked to scale these demands vis-à-vis the views of other revolutionaries across the country. From this followed a discussion within which they were able to distinguish their personal views with the expertise they gathered in the protests concerning a wider group of participants. Mentioned in all interviews as the top demand was a reform of the political system, realised through a fall of the government. Overall agreement seems to exist when it comes to abolishing the confessional system. Yet when envisioning how a new government ought to be established alternatives differed in various respects. While some activists were set on a government of technocrats describing that the way to fix this country would be to make a doctor a minister of health or an academic minister of education, others did not perceive this as crucial. Instead of focussing on technocrats what ought to be a priority should be independent people with vision who put the country as a whole first and not only their region, according to the activist from ‘An Haqak Dafie.’<sup>175</sup> One activist from Binaa Dawla stressed that a new government should reflect those in the 17 October movement.<sup>176</sup> Related to this, an activist from Marsad Shaabi emphasised the importance of creating a strong opposition as the system would only change when put under significant pressure, which can only be done if those opposing the current government manage to organise and coordinate.<sup>177</sup> How this transition can be realised is another important point brought up when discussing the demand for political change. What was held in particularly high regard by one activist from MMFD was ‘imposing a negotiation for a peaceful transition of the power’.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, it seems awareness exists of the risks associated with changing the political power in the country. An activist from the National Bloc employed the following metaphor to describe the insecurity regarding a change in power:

<sup>175</sup> Interview with activist, ‘An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

<sup>176</sup> Interview with activist, Binaa Dawla (online, 23 June 2020).

<sup>177</sup> Interview with activist, Marsad Shaabi (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>178</sup> Interview with activist, MMFD (online, 10 June 2020).

The fear or the challenge is that the people, they don't want to jump ship unless there is another ship to jump to. And this is what we are trying to do, which is creating a credible alternative for the current political club, in order for the people to feel safe in shifting ships, but not jumping into the sea.<sup>179</sup>

Interesting to note is that both these activists from MMFD and from the National Bloc are thus related to already established opposition groups with electoral experience. Groups without this experience or less institutionalised would arguably need more time to come to political programmes that allow for early re-elections. The protests saw a large upsurge of new groups or reformation of groups that are still working on developing elaborate political programmes. Arguably this explains why activists differ in how they want an alternative government to take shape. Instead of having quick new elections, it could benefit some to first have an interim government with the judiciary power to implement a new electoral law and elections after which a new non-confessional government can be elected. Summarised by an activist from Lihaqqi:

People are fed up with the sectarian system, it's not working anymore, they are looking for alternatives. Are they all aligned behind one alternative? No, this is nonsense, nonsense to say so, but they are all fed up with the existing sectarian system.<sup>180</sup>

Related to the main political demand calling for a change in the political system, the creation and implementation of a new electoral law was a frequently recurring topic. Notwithstanding that the call for a new electoral law is widely supported, it has led to rigorous debate concerning its contents. One activist and electoral expert described how the discussion of a new election law is 'not only about districting, but it's about reforming the administration of the elections'.<sup>181</sup> While the demands for political reform enjoyed the highest ratings when respondents were asked to scale them on agreement across the country, they went down significantly when asked to include an electoral law reform, either changing from 8/10 to 3.5/10 or from 10/10 to 7/10. In contrast to this, demands relating to the financial state of the country appear to be shared very broadly. Most frequently it was mentioned

<sup>179</sup> Interview with activist, National Bloc (online, 12 June 2020).

<sup>180</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>181</sup> Interview with activist, National Bloc (online, 12 June 2020).

in the interviews as the second most important demand that enjoys the broadest support base across the country. The activist from 'An Haqak Dafie explained how this might be due to the fact that there is no one on the ground for whom it takes any effort nor risks any negative consequences when action is undertaken to restore stolen funds through corruption.<sup>182</sup> As a consequence it is an easy point to score support on. Yet the more in-depth political programmes go with new financial plans, the more disagreement seems to arise. General agreement exists that a new financial plan ought to be in favour of the people and not the ruling oligarchy, but that is of course not specific enough to get the country out of its financial crisis. An activist with an economic background from Beirut Madinati emphasised this by saying:

In general I would say the economic themes were less prominent in people's regard. So you would hear general statements like 'we know they robbed us, we know they are using our money', so general statements, but clear demands of what we want not so much on the economic front.<sup>183</sup>

The most apparent demand related to a reform of the economy referred thus to the corruption of politicians and is interrelated to demands referring to a judicial system capable of holding corrupt individuals accountable.

All in all, the demands might thus be built by diverse protesters who only agree to varying extents with specificities of demands, yet a general call for a new political system that fights corruption and clientelism is at the core. An activist from Saida Tantafed explained how through various issues the Lebanese people started to sense that the country is becoming increasingly inappropriate to bring children up in:

From 2011 we started sensing that there is something wrong, this country is no longer applicable for people to live in. We started to think we had been doing something wrong with getting children to live. We spend nights that we don't see the electricity and we have to depend on the generator or to depend on candles and we spend the summer usually without water so we can get a bath or anything. And we have a problem with everything that we get for food. We are people that work and don't have savings. I've been working for 30 years and I don't have an account at the bank, I don't have money in my bank so I can save for my kids so

<sup>182</sup> Interview with activist, 'An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

<sup>183</sup> Interview with activist, Beirut Madinati (23 June 2020).

they can go to university when they grow up. Everything that we collect from our work we spend because everything is expensive. We pay taxes but we don't get facilities in life.<sup>184</sup>

On the one hand the October uprising saw a breaking down of a wall of fear, empowering people to go out and voice whatever frustration or issues they were dealing with. Correspondingly the demands appeared to be a litany of problems requiring change. On the other hand, the above-mentioned quote shows how the demands mostly concern the government's inadequacy to provide in basic services and infrastructure for its population. The extent to which people are affected by these issues however differs significantly based on individual factors, related to for example regional background, socio-economic status or access to *wasta*, in the eyes of the activist from Marsad Shaabi.<sup>185</sup>

### 6.3. REGIONAL SPECTRUM OF PROTESTERS

As mentioned, the decentralised nature and protest hotspots outside of Beirut are key features of the October uprising. Due to its widespread nature it is thus important to consider potential regional differences, or similarities, among activists. In the case of Lebanon, regional differences are additionally important to consider, due to the political system in place. The electoral system in place requires people to vote in the place where they were born, not currently residing. Consequently, the electoral districts in combination with the confessional system in place enshrine sectarian differences between regions further. Hence checking for regional differences has additional political importance in the Lebanese case. Arguably, respondents in the interviews are very aware of the sensitivities concerning regional differences as they become equated with sectarian or political affiliations. Therefore, none of the activists pointed to regional differences as aligned with sectarian identity. First the interviewed activists were requested to describe what they would consider a typical profile of a revolutionary, before trying to delve further into potential differences and their influence.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with activist, Saida Tantafed (24 June 2020).

<sup>185</sup> Interview with activist, Marsad Shaabi (27 May 2020).

It is arguably because the protesters pride themselves on this widespread nature as it strengthens the movement, the interviewed activists were disinclined to delve into differences between regions. The sectarian divide in politics that is being fought against is perpetuated among the population when too much attention is given to one's regional or sectarian background. Consequently, this is something most activists attempted not to talk about, apart from when emphasising the opposite, being the non-sectarian nature of the protesters. An activist from Marsad Shaabi described 'being individual is like being independent. Having an individual identity, not having a collective identity. I'm thinking familial, confessional, or regional collective identity'.<sup>186</sup> The difficulty of dissociating oneself from one's entourage was emphasised. Likewise the individuality of protesters was touched upon in various answers. Instead many responses focussed on how the movement's participants are too broad to specify. Yet they were defined by their expertise and what they bring to the revolution. Some respondents themselves said they would have never considered themselves to be perceived as an activist or revolutionary and recognise this among the protest. Albeit unexpected, the Massirat Watan activist said:

I do feel I am an activist, I have become one and I think you'll see the ladies of Achrafieh coming down sometimes with their dogs. And you see also the hardcore leftists coming to hit the bank. I've seen some friends of mine who are bankers going down to the demonstrations, that's how broad it is.<sup>187</sup>

The only difference that was often named in relation to regional dimensions is that of socio-economic status. The Lihaqqi activist described this as follows:

There were the revolting middle class, with different educational and financial background. and definitely the middle-lower class and definitely the upper class who is not benefitting from the current system. Or the upper class who have different agendas than the current system, although those are minorities. and you have the lower class and we have seen them specifically outside Beirut, in Tripoli, in Bekaa in Chouf and Aley, in Tyre and in Nabatiyyeh.<sup>188</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Interview with activist, Marsad Shaabi (27 May 2020).

<sup>187</sup> Interview with activist, Massirat Watan (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>188</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

While the excerpt above shows that all socio-economic classes were represented, it does zoom in on certain areas where lower classes are more represented. This matches with a distinction made by the National Bloc activist, between urban areas, where people can afford more time to politics, and rural areas, '[w]here it's pure economical, social demands and they say "solve the issue we don't care how, we don't care who, but we have problems that need to be solved"'.<sup>189</sup>

These differences have impacted the protests mostly through increased solidarity by having people of such different backgrounds come together. In Saida for example a main protest group was reformed into a group working on relief for the poor in Saida after COVID-19 started spreading. A clear cooperation was noted between the more wealthy people financially supporting the activist in their distribution and relief work for those suffering from poverty in the town. The activist from Saida Tantafed identified herself as part of the middle level. Through the protest and the eventual effect of COVID-19 she came in touch with people from a higher level she said would already be surprised about what was considered 'normal food for us' and simultaneously she talked about how helping the poor of Saida opened her eyes to the living conditions of some people from a 'lower level'.<sup>190</sup> Likewise she shared an experience from during the protests, where a lady from a higher socio-economic class was surprised at the similar way of thinking she experienced from people out on the streets:

So even the wealthier people, when they went to the streets now they noticed that there are different kinds of people they didn't notice before, one of the ladies I got to know after the 17th, told me once: I didn't know that people from a lower level can think this way.<sup>191</sup>

All in all, an influential divide among protesters seems to run along the lines of socio-economic class. Although this might also be a point of strength in regards to how the problems faced by differing groups might still come down to a similar root cause. The MMFD activist noted on the regional differences that particularly for the north the level of poverty is much more striking than elsewhere, while in the south they struggle with

<sup>189</sup> Interview with activist, National Bloc (online, 12 June 2020).

<sup>190</sup> Interview with activist, Saida Tantafed (online, 24 June 2020).

<sup>191</sup> Interview with activist, Saida Tantafed (online, 24 June 2020).

more issues related to ‘the Israeli aggressions’.<sup>192</sup> Historically the people who suffered from those hold on to appreciation for the richer people in their communities who ‘were able to get rid of the Israeli occupation and stop them from invading again in 2006’, according to the same activist. This is one example where political parties or foreign sectarian groups might still be able to influence the protest through relations with specific particular regions. Nonetheless this was nuanced by the MMFD activist, saying that although there were attempts of manipulation, ‘it was just trying to diverge [the protests] in certain sides, but it was never dominant’.<sup>193</sup> Yet it explains why the responsibilities of some activists on the ground go further than logistics and spreading demands. A description of the responsibilities of the National Bloc activists shows this as follows:

How to coordinate with other people to call for action, when to withdraw from the streets, when to take back the streets, where is the starting point, where is the ending point, because in order to avoid the clashes that took place on the streets and to avoid that people, let’s say the ghosts as we like to call them here, infiltrating the movement that is taking place and taking it to somewhere we don’t want to take it.<sup>194</sup>

The National Bloc activist then goes on to explain that ghosts refers to people who come ‘[e]ither from security services or from existing political parties, in order to create clashes, because clashes on the ground, usually, make the masses afraid of staying on the streets’.<sup>195</sup> These clashes thus act as a repellent factor those responsible for the protest aim to avert. This relates to a point made where it was said different phases of the protests attract different profiles. Initially, the protests were celebrated for being welcoming even to families with kids. Also multiple marginalised communities attended calling for their rights, ranging from those without citizenship, eg ‘people from a Syrian father’, or the LGTBQ community or women suffering from gender-based violence, according to the Lihaqqi activist.<sup>196</sup> Nonetheless this relied very much on safety on the ground. A rise in arrests of protesters of violent clashes in the protests decreased this welcoming nature. One of the activists who works as a lawyer defending the rights of detained

<sup>192</sup> Interview with activist, MMFD (online, 10 June 2020).

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Interview with activist, National Bloc (online, 12 June 2020).

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

protesters since 2011 emphasised the risks that come with speaking out in Lebanon. The stress put on remaining anonymous by various other interviewees further confirmed an increasing risk in Lebanon for one's right to freedom of expression and protest.

#### 6.4. PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS REFUGEES

The main goal of the October uprising was undeniably an attempt at change of Lebanon's politics. Yet as can be gathered from the literature review the presence of Syrian refugees is a factor influencing many facets of the country. Ranging from additional strain on public infrastructure and services due to the amount of refugees hosted in the country to the effect it has on the political scene. The October uprising as a catalyst of change in the country will thus affect the refugee population and vice versa. Hence a second part of the interview guide delved into the topic of refugee presence in the country, particularly Syrian refugees, and how these were positioned in the October uprising. Firstly, activists were asked to talk about their personal feelings towards Lebanon hosting such a big amount of Syrians, leading to very diverse responses.

If anything can be taken from the replies on activists' feelings about Syrian refugees it is the myriad of nuances expressed. It does not suffice to conclude about one's negative or positive feelings based on whether they expressed Syrian presence as a cause of financial instability or insecurity in the country. A common narrative is how Syrian refugees come to steal jobs from the Lebanese, which was thus used to probe some of the respondents. Out of ten, two activists agreed to this point, without asking about the effect on the labour market. The Saida Tantafered activist explained it as follows:

I don't have any problem welcoming them, but the problem is that the Syrian refugees are given rights that are bigger than the right that the Palestinian refugees are given. When the Syrian refugees came to Lebanon, most of the Lebanese themselves lost their jobs, and that was a problem. For example, all the Lebanese that were working with the building industry they stopped working, and I know several people that were working in building, they stopped when the Syrian refugees came to Lebanon, so this is one of the problems, but they are most welcome until their issues are solved in their country.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Interview with activist, Saida Tantafered (online, 24 June 2020).

Syrians stealing jobs of Lebanese people is a trope addressed by some other respondents too, yet the blame was put elsewhere. One respondent from Marsad Shaabi, who was unemployed at the time of the interview, explained how he saw the rate of Syrians in his field of work rising following the conflict in Syria. Nonetheless, he holds the employer responsible:

For me it's not the Syrian taking my place, but it's the Syrian trying to find a job and the employer trying to cut expenses and raise his gains. So he hires a Syrian person instead of Lebanese, gives him a lower salary and profits off of him because he doesn't declare him, so that the Syrian does not have access to social security. The employer abuses the Syrian and doesn't care about the Lebanese employee. So my 'enemy' is the employer and not the Syrian, or Palestinian or any other foreigner.<sup>198</sup>

Apart from blaming the Syrians themselves or the Lebanese employers, the most criticism was expressed towards how the Lebanese government has handled hosting Syrians. It was emphasised that Syrians are not here for fun or tourism, but because they need protection and are deserving of the same social justice that the government is currently failing to provide for both Lebanese and non-Lebanese. Furthermore, in two instances it was emphasised how refugees are even utilised in politics:

I feel good that we are hosting a good number of Syrian refugees. I feel bad that we are not hosting them well and I feel bad that some populist politicians are investing too much time and effort in making Syrians look bad for me as a citizen and for the economy, while they are not.<sup>199</sup>

The sectarian leaders used this as if it was a card in their game, not as a reality affecting the society and its stability. So it's not a matter of feeling but the real state like we are aiming to build is there for all its residents and needs to know who are they, where do they live, what do they do, how they live, where is their income coming from. The so-called international community they distribute funds to those refugees, not through the Lebanese government, so we have 1.5 million residents in Lebanon nobody knows nor where they live, what they do, what are their revenues, where is it coming from, what they are doing, nothing, because we don't want to deal with realities, because the reality is the opposite of our political system.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Interview with activist, Marsad Shaabi (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>199</sup> Interview with activist, Lihagqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>200</sup> Interview with activist, MMFD (online, 10 June 2020).

The latter quote links this failure of the Lebanese government to deal with the refugees to the role of the international community. The international community seems to side-line the Lebanese government to a certain extent in their aid distribution to refugees. Possibly due to this, many activists were unable to verify their claims concerning the impact of refugees. Whether it concerns the potential benefit or the economic burden they pose, little to no conclusive evidence was provided. The literature review pointed to some existing figures on the impact of refugees in the country, so while this data does exist not everyone might be as aware. Lack of awareness arguably made it more possible for the government to utilise Syrian refugees as 'a card in their game', to use Syrians as a scapegoat for the country's hardships. On the other hand, this does not confirm nor deny the potential Syrians might have on Lebanon. How this potential takes shape can also differ, as shown for example by this response from a 'An Haqak Dafie activist:

I feel it is a matter that has not been handled well at all which reflects the government's capabilities. It is a human case. Refugees might even be of added value, or maybe not, but with the policy that is taken we will never know of this potential. There is a lack of official procedure, although of course there is a need of support from the international community.<sup>201</sup>

Due to the government's lack of procedure there is no sight of the money entering Lebanon to assist the Syrian refugees in the country. According to a Lihaqqi activist, '[t]he foreign money coming to Lebanon because of hosting the Syrian refugees and its impact on the economy is minimum 10 times bigger than the negative financial impact they are having on the economy'.<sup>202</sup> Simultaneously the lack of government competence over this money points to another player of influence; namely the donors or the West. This was emphasised by the activist from Beirut Madinati as such:

I feel this is definitely a political card that would be used by the West at some point to request nationalization of the refugees in return for something, X, and I'm not talking out of a communitarian fear. As I said earlier, I am very much aware of the UN and the donor policies, with regards to refugees, and I feel that there is a strong push to say that refugees are here to stay.<sup>203</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Interview with activist, 'An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

<sup>202</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>203</sup> Interview with activist, Beirut Madinati (online, 23 June 2020).

This is only one way in which the donors are affecting the feelings towards refugees in the country. Moreover, it seems the crises that have fuelled the protests of the October uprising are exacerbating tensions between refugees and vulnerable host communities. Above it is already mentioned that Syrians were perceived to receive more benefits than Palestinians. Besides this, the increasing poverty levels and the unproportioned channelling of aid to refugees will ‘blow up in the face of the donors, in the face of the international community and in the face of the government’, according to the Beirut Madinati activist. In several instances parallels were drawn between the situation Lebanese citizens are living in to the lives of refugees in the country. An activist from within the Lebanese Communist Party refused to call them refugees, but instead wanted to refer to them as residents:

Well first they are not refugees, it’s a demeaning categorization. If you call them refugees it’s discrimination, so I like to call them residents here in Lebanon and all the problems that they are suffering is because of the Lebanese regime and is the same for all minorities in Lebanon. Their struggle is connected to the struggle of Lebanese people because of the marginalization, discrimination, poverty and because of the sectarian regime that has its own sectarian calculations and structure they are also suffering the same. So everyone who is residing in Lebanon is afflicted by this including them.<sup>204</sup>

Interesting to note is that while this respondent did not want to label the Syrian population in Lebanon as refugees, he was insisting on a policy that focussed on safe repatriation to Syria. As such the label of residents as employed here does not put refugees on the same foothold as Lebanese citizens. Apart from economic considerations, there were also remarks regarding socio-historical elements influencing people’s feelings towards refugees. At first glance, one might anticipate that a reference to the 2006 war with Israel and the Lebanese who fled to Syria would yield a sentiment of reciprocity. On the contrary, the comparison stressed Lebanon’s capacities as insufficient, according to the Binaa Dawla activist:

<sup>204</sup> Interview with activist, LCP (online, 6 June 2020).

In 2006 during the Israeli war and many Lebanese have refuged in Syria, seeking safety. And Syria at that time has included them and given them what they needed throughout the war, which lasted for 33 days. Syria is bigger than Lebanon demographically and geographically, so they can include these numbers, even 100,000s they would be able to contain. Lebanon is only 4 million people, so Syria could contain these refugees more easily.<sup>205</sup>

On top of this, the Syrian occupation in Lebanon and the related abuses are still fresh in the minds of many, as pointed out by the 'An Haqak Dafie activist:

Also the memory and trauma of the Syrian occupation plays a large role and I can understand how someone who still suffers from the trauma of a family member being assassinated by a Syrian now not welcoming refugees from the same country with open arms.<sup>206</sup>

Personal feelings concerning refugees thus derive from a myriad of factors. It is recognised as a problem all around. Yet who is being held responsible varies between Lebanese employers, the government, the West or refugees themselves. Consequently, it would fall short to put activists into categories defining them as positive or negative in relation to the refugee presence, because all hospitality has its limits.

## 6.5. PROTEST RHETORIC ON SYRIAN REFUGEES

Whether refugees have a place in the protests, or in the demands of the protests, is where the biggest contrast in responses is noted. On the one hand, some activists referred to discussions on the need for systemic change in Lebanon where refugees were also considered. On the other hand, some activists stated that the October uprising is purely about Lebanese internal change and the refugee issue is something outside of that. On both sides variations exist.

Undeniably the focus and spark of the uprising is on the Lebanese political establishment, as can be seen from the demands discussed above. Notwithstanding this, for some this requires a complete system change that includes hosting policies. For instance, a Massirat Watan

<sup>205</sup> Interview with activist, Binaa Dawla (online, 23 June 2020).

<sup>206</sup> Interview with activist, 'An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

activist explained that, '[a]s soon as you start talking about the political situation, the element of migration is so important you cannot neglect it'.<sup>207</sup> This was based on an understanding of the protest as calling for a system that ensures social justice. Thus while asking for social justice in Lebanon, it ought to apply to all. Likewise, the activist from the National Bloc emphasised how the October uprising is seen as a revolution for human rights, which are not limited only to the Lebanese. Out of ten only two recognised it as an integral part to the political change being called for. Another layer within the discussion is those who purely discussed the Syrian refugees as a humanitarian concern. This mostly focussed on protecting their basic rights as long as they are in the country and look into future possibilities like safe return to Syria afterwards. Groups such as Marsad Shaabi, Lihaqqi, MMFD, the National Bloc, the Lebanese Communist Party and Beirut Madinati referred to the fact that they have encompassing programmes where topics of refugee hosting and their positions are discussed. Nonetheless these programmes exist separate from their demands within the protests and thus do not have to reflect their input in the protest's discussions.

Yet the majority of smaller groups that rose up during the October uprising do not have refugees as their core consideration, just like more established groups do not spotlight the topic. A reason given for this is the fact that it can easily turn into a divisive topic for groups. Consequently, it is sometimes included in discussions with the public, but not brought to the fore in discussions among groups or so it seems. The delicate balance between groups being in favour of certain rights and protection for refugees, but against other rights or privileges, was exemplified by an activist from the Lebanese Communist Party:

We believe that we are with their safe return and not to throw them out in the streets without rights, they need to have the ability to live in dignity. Also we are against discriminative acts against Syrians and giving humanitarian aid to them.<sup>208</sup>

On the other hand, several activists purported that little variation existed on the views of refugees within the coalition in which their group is active. If anything, the differences mainly seem to revolve around

<sup>207</sup> Interview with activist, Massirat Watan (online, 27 May 2020).

<sup>208</sup> Interview with activist, LCP (online, 6 June 2020).

the topics of repatriation or aid distribution. Groups that openly state to be against refugees are believed to be a minority, according to the interviews. Nonetheless, the absence of the topic in many discussion forums of activist groups makes it impossible to conclude about real variations on the topic.

While these protest groups mostly consist of Lebanese activists discussing topics that would also concern Syrian refugees, there was some Syrian presence in the protests themselves initially. Nonetheless this presence quickly died down due to various factors. A Lihaqqi activist said the following about it:

It does not have to be direct, to say for example 'You are French? don't go to the protest, you are Irish? don't go to the protests'. That's not how it works, they would say, 'all the protesters are French'. What they are saying is that the violence will be against you as well, so it's an indirect threat. And one more thing. Most of the counter-revolution attacks were happening from Aounist who are very well-known for their hate speech of Syrians. And this alone is enough for them to not go to the streets or to feel afraid.<sup>209</sup>

As such the presence of Syrians themselves in the protests became very slim. Either because the focus of the protests is more on Lebanese internal affairs, or because Syrians would face additional risks in their participation. These risks thus come down to either compromising the movement by media portrayals of foreign influence or by becoming targeted in specific by counter-protesters on the basis of your identity. Previous research supports this hesitation of Syrian refugees when it comes to (informal) political participation, as they 'would face a high degree of resistance, which could put refugees in an even more vulnerable position'.<sup>210</sup>

In an attempt to distinguish regional differences in how refugees are perceived in the protests it appears that regions do not differ particularly. At most some activists would say that regions with higher percentages of refugees vis-à-vis Lebanese population might think differently. In what way they differ is something that the interviewed activists said not to know for sure. One possible differentiation was related to differences

<sup>209</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>210</sup> Z El Hérou, *Political Participation of Refugees: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) 2018) 22.

in socio-economic class or labour-intensity of the local economy. In this case it was proposed that regions who rely more on labour-intensive industry would feel the effect of the refugee presence most economically. Nonetheless to confirm this further research would be required.

## 6.6. OUTCOME OF THE PROTESTS

After unpacking the demands, the participants of the protests and where refugees are placed within the discourse, the question remains what all this might result in. Studying an object in motion is a difficult task, so final conclusions on what the October uprising achieved will have to wait. Nonetheless, without a doubt a change occurred. To unravel what this means, activists were asked to explain how they expect to explain what happened following 17 October 2019 in 20 years from now.

Although clear material achievements are yet to be determined, it was without a doubt that most activists referred to an achieved change in the mindsets of people. After this wall of fear was broken and people opened their eyes to the reality they live in, more critical thinking set in. This critical thinking in turn was directed at the government from which higher accountability is now required. Even without elections people are said to have become more politically engaged through asking questions and not taking government explanations blindly at face value. Furthermore, differences between the population seem to become overshadowed by a sense that change for all is needed, based on a vision that includes the fears of every community to ensure access and equality in rights and obligations for all. This necessity for a recognition of Lebanese citizenship along non-sectarian lines was expressed in the following way by lawyer and activist from Binaa Dawla:

That the country of sects does not achieve a state, that the sectarian human being, the citizen who is loyal to a sectarian mindset, is not a citizen in a nation-state. That citizenship is belonging to a state and accepting all the components of the society, all together reaching to building a modern state, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder...<sup>211</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Interview with activist, Binaa Dawla (online, 23 June 2020).

Then from this recognition of one Lebanese community where one's communitarian identity ought not to be the primary one a new system needs to follow. This system is envisaged by a Lihaqqi activist in the following way:

We will have a new system that is a non-sectarian system that is not based on where you come from, what god you choose to believe in, what religion you were obliged to by chance be in, a more just system, a more economically just system, a system that does not leave behind vulnerable groups; LGTBQ communities, Syrian refugees, Palestinian peoples. A system where everyone has their stake in defending it, in making it work for the best of everyone.<sup>212</sup>

Although the non-sectarian nature and the more economically just system is something reflected in most statements, the focus on vulnerable groups is more contested. For example, the activists that spoke out against humanitarian aid for Syrians would not include this focus in their future outlook. On top of that it was expressed by the activist from Binaa Dawla that categorical rights are a leisure:

In protests it's not the time to work on categorical rights, LGBTQ is a leisure in modern societies that we cannot have now in this uprising times. We are in a state that is on the verge on total collapse, financially, socially and politically and in terms of social security.<sup>213</sup>

The main difference in expectations thus lies in how overarching or encompassing the course for change needs to be. Yet all seem to agree that the status quo is gone and a rigorous change is in the making. The way the question was asked might have triggered some wishful thinking, leading the answers to sometimes be on the optimistic side. When some cautionary notes were expressed they often referred to a risk of violence. The most explanatory answer of what this risk entails was expressed by an activist from within MMFD:

So I would say hopefully these protests started in 2019 in 17th of October has been the result of a major crisis but it led to a more stable country and a more prosperous society, if we succeed in implementing our project. Otherwise we are afraid that in case we don't succeed the country will be going in a very dangerous direction via a very high level of

<sup>212</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>213</sup> Interview with activist, Binaa Dawla (online, 23 June 2020).

violence. Either spontaneous or organised, a huge mass immigration and who will remain in the country will be the people who do not have the choice of leaving it and then we will have a society of smashed population with very few extremely rich and powerful people, so we will back to something closer to slavery with chaos. So those are the two pictures that we are today on the point where we need to decide which direction. We as a movement we are struggling to go to the bright direction, not to the dark one.<sup>214</sup>

Here the danger cautioned for in this quote includes a reference to mass immigration. In a country with as many refugees as Lebanon, the refugee community functions as a constant reminder of possible effects of armed conflict.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with activist, MMFD (online, 10 June 2020).

## 7.

## DISCUSSION

The results outlined above can only be characterised by their multiplicity in approaches to the protests and the place of refugees within them. Answering the research question 'to what extent does the October uprising signify a shift in the popular perception of Syrian refugees?' calls for an in-depth analysis of the results and whether they are capable of confirming or rejecting the hypotheses derived from the literature review. In attempting to answer the research question with these results, the intention is to unravel whether the October uprising is only a reaction of opposition to a political system or if it might be a more proactive promotion of a different and new value system in the country.

The emphasis on diversity of opinions in the protests has been woven into the thesis. Therefore, the amorphous aspects of the protests and the multitude of opinions and positions on this one topic create a challenge in confirming or rejecting any hypothesis. Nevertheless, the insights shared provide evidence to support or weaken the hypotheses. As a result, the relation between this study's results and the wider literature reviewed are discussed.

**The government, not the refugees, are perceived as the main problem in the country.**

As the October uprising is in clear opposition to the current political establishment in Lebanon, indeed this was the focus of the protesters. The variety of issues that pushed people out to the streets point to many different problems faced by Lebanon's population. Nonetheless, what seems particular about the October uprising is the fact that the main cause undergirding all these problems is the political establishment. To be more specific, it is the sectarian system and related clientelism and corruption that is understood to be the cause of the hardships

faced. Therefore, within the protest it is beyond dispute that the government is at the core. Hence, the data provides evidence to confirm it is the government that is central as the main problem in the protests. Nonetheless, it is not possible to confirm whether the refugees are not understood as an issue. Independent of the approach that activists would adopt in dealing with the refugees post-uprising, the fact remains that to them the government has failed as well in handling the refugee influx. On the one hand, their potential to have positive effects on the country was mentioned by some activists. Without appropriate government policy this cannot be confirmed however. On the other hand, it was also widely agreed upon that refugees do not only suffer from many issues in the same way Lebanese people do, but also that they might add to it. So, confirming the government is the main issue does not take refugees out of the equation. Rather, from the data comes forward that many activists do see it as an issue in need of a solution, yet as something that ought to come after the uprising succeeds. Not putting refugees on the agenda within the protests thus does not mean they are not considered an issue that needs to be addressed.

**Protesters link refugees less to issues of public infrastructure, economy, security and politics, particularly the sectarian balance, than popular opinion would prior to the October uprising.**

The literature review pointed to four broad fields within which the effects of the Syrian refugee presence in the country had been noted in earlier studies. These cover a strain on the economy, public infrastructure, sense of security and politics, particularly when it comes to the country's sectarian balance. From the data only one of these was consistently referred to by various activists; being the economy. In that field there was a lot of attention for the dire economic situation Lebanon is in and the additional strain Syrians might be on this. On the other hand, little conclusive statements were made on this point. Instead, criticism was voiced concerning the government's policy that makes it impossible to know for certain the effects of the influx. While knowing how many people, with what skills, expertise and income, you have in your country could allow for informed policies that make the best out of it, this was emphasised not to be the reality in Lebanon. Hence, those that brought up the possibility of Syrian refugees having the potential to benefit the Lebanese economy were unable to prove this to be truly plausible. The only way in which this was attempted was

through the argument that the influx of humanitarian aid following the influx of Syrians has been beneficial for Lebanon's economy.

Contrary to this, this humanitarian aid poses issues in the relations between refugees and host communities. The lack of spill-over of aid, or financial benefits, and thus acknowledgement for local host communities and their hardships leads to new issues. The feeling that Syrian refugees in Lebanon might be better off than local populations is present in the literature review and also reflected in the interviews, particularly when it comes to critiques of aid distribution by the international community, where the focus on refugees and not vulnerable host communities is the main problem. In relation to the current state Lebanon is in, this could arguably become worse, since the levels of poverty are rising. The regional differences suggested an overlap between areas where socio-economic backgrounds of people are lower. Both in the literature review and in the data collection this was suggested to be the case. Nonetheless from both sources no conclusive evidence can be drawn that in more impoverished areas indeed the perception of refugees is more negative. What the suggestions do tell is that the labelling done by the international level of who is considered a refugee and in turn deserving of aid influences how refugees are perceived in the country. Yet the frustration following this does not have to be higher in impoverished areas that are affected versus in more affluent regions with less refugees. These points suggest that areas where there are more Syrian refugees and contact between hosts and refugees more frequent, the perception differs. Yet as was taken from Baylouny and Klingseis' research in the literature review, the most negative opinions were most pervasive among classes who felt the consequences of Syrian refugees less directly.<sup>215</sup> Also in the results from the interview the point was made that areas where people are in more direct contact with refugees, views might differ. But after asking further no one confirmed whether this made people more negative or positive.

When it comes to other factors like security or stress on public infrastructure, the former was not talked about at all and the latter only in relation to criticism of the government. The threat to the sectarian

<sup>215</sup> AM Baylouny and SJ Klingseis, 'Water Thieves or Political Catalysts? Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon' (2018) 25 Middle East Policy 104; S Atrache, 'Lebanon at a Crossroads: Growing Uncertainty for Syrian Refugees' (Refugees International 2020) <[www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/28/lebanon-crossroads-growing-uncertainty-syrian-refugees](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/28/lebanon-crossroads-growing-uncertainty-syrian-refugees)> accessed 5 October 2021.

balance as came forward in the literature review is understandably a lot less emphasised in the results, seeing as this was only an issue for the political system in place. Since the October uprising fights to get rid of the sectarian divides enshrined in the political system, it promotes a system without those sectarian divides. Therefore, the effect Syrians might have on the demographics influencing this sectarian balance become less of an issue within the protests' narratives.

**The October uprising is not only about political but also social change and thus puts forward a more inclusive discourse towards vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as refugees, in contrast to the nationalistic discourse of elites in power.**

The goal of the October uprising does not end at only changing the players in power. It is clear that a more systematic change is required with reforms in many sectors that make up the political system currently in place. More than only a political change, judicial and economic reforms are also key to the calls of the protesters, with human rights regarded as guiding principles in these reforms. This with the overall goal of creating a country where corruption is curbed and good governance promoted. Yet a goal as comprehensive as this one will still have its limits. The literature review referred to Carl Schmitt and the premise that it is the sovereign who decides on the exception.<sup>216</sup> Now that the state discourse is being criticised and rejected, the protesters have a say in who is the 'exception' in their narrative of what Lebanon ought to become. Within this narrative, the concept of one Lebanese community, not split along sectarian divides, takes centre-stage. It is said that one's regional, communitarian, religious, ethnic or socio-economic background is not of importance, as everybody is struggling with the same issues caused by the overarching political system. Consequently, the October uprising introduced and spread a form of Lebanese nationalism that called for an inclusive change.

Yet when asked if this change is directed at only internal issues related to corruption and governance or also includes a human rights perspective, opinions start to differ. Some activists are wary not to lose the main focus of the protests, a change in political system. To achieve

<sup>216</sup> C Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press 2005).

this, activists seem conscious of the need to have a broad support base nation-wide. Coordination and cooperation among protests groups that vary in nature, depending on region, topic, structure and overall opinion, has been challenging. From long-standing groups such as the National Bloc or the Lebanese Communist Party to much younger groups like 'An Haqak Dafie that arose within the October uprising, finding a common narrative is both a struggle and a necessity for success. What connects all of them together is the rejection of the current system of governance.

Nonetheless, generally older groups still include Syrian refugees in their programmes, when outlining a political vision for the country that goes further than protest demands, acknowledging the struggles Syrians face within Lebanon, but also acknowledging the additional issues the refugee presence poses on the country. Next to this, some activists claimed the refugee issue to be completely outside of the October uprising's concerns. In this case it could be argued that excluding the topic is still a conscious decision that can tell us something. Even when activists expressed that the refugee topic was merely a secondary topic, or not at all part of the protests, they often continued to explain this was because the issue causes division among groups. Therefore, it is a topic on which later debate can be expected.

The politicised places hypothesis by Hopkins as covered in the literature review proposed that a sudden influx in combination with a salient national rhetoric can lead to hostility towards immigrants or refugees in a given society.<sup>217</sup> In Lebanon prior to the October uprising this seems applicable, combining the large size of the refugee influx with the sense of threat that was woven through many politicians' populist xenophobic comments. The populism pointed out by Margalit in the literature review was reflected in the results as well through criticism by for example a Lihaqqi activist on a politician's comments concerning refugees.<sup>218</sup> This was mentioned in relation to counter-revolution attacks by groups connected to political parties known for being particularly anti-Syrian. Now when trying to apply this hypothesis to the situation within the October uprising some considerations come to

<sup>217</sup> DJ Hopkins, 'Politicized Places: Explaining Where and When Immigrants Provoke Local Opposition' (2010) 104 *American Political Science Review* 40.

<sup>218</sup> Y Margalit, 'Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered' (2019) 33 *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 152.

the fore. Firstly, defining the current refugee presence as a sudden influx is not the most straightforward. Yet when taking a negative definition of sudden influx as a starting point, it suffices to say that as long as the refugees are not integrated they can still be perceived as a new addition to the society. Although the nature of the Syrian conflict can be considered protracted by now, the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is certainly not considered permanent as of now. Next to this, a salient national rhetoric has arisen within the October uprising for sure, albeit in contrast to the government's national rhetoric. Also the sense of threat posed by the refugees has not disappeared, yet seems more limited to economic concerns only. Possibly the staggering financial crisis the country is in might cause this sense of threat to increase. Thus based on this hypothesis, the continuation of hostile political reactions towards refugees cannot be ruled out. Rather the current focus on the political establishment and need for a united opposition puts the topic of refugees further down on the agenda.

Nevertheless, all around the protests the government's instrumentalization of refugee presence for political gains was denounced. Criticism of the state's narrative is thus a general thing, no matter the group's standpoints to dealing with the refugee presence. Notwithstanding this, criticism towards the government's rhetoric and method of managing the refugee influx does not translate directly into more inclusive points of view of protest groups. While concluding the intended change will be more inclusive towards marginalised groups goes one step too far as of now, at the very least a bottom line can be seen that requires a better hosting policy. This should be a policy informed by truthful information that allows a government to at least attempt improvements in the access to human rights and insurance of life in dignity of both Lebanese citizens and refugees. How this takes shape, however, differs significantly in the eyes of different activists. While some might hope to see an integration and use of refugee potential to benefit the economy, others work towards Lebanon as a safe transit haven that works together with the international community and Syrian government to get Syrians to return. Seeing as for both sides this remains speculation for now a conclusion is difficult to draw. Yet signs exist for a rights-based call for political change among most groups, although simultaneously clear signs of 'othering' or scapegoating of refugees also remain in stories told. These relate in particular to the work of

Zetter and that of de Zwart as covered in the literature review.<sup>219</sup> The issue of categorising or labelling came to the fore when activists shared their feelings towards refugees. Three versions can be identified from the results. The first one being informed by recognition that refugees share the same problems and thus need to be thought of in the same frames, relating to the work of Deets.<sup>220</sup> In this case there is little eye for distinctions or discrimination between Lebanese and Syrians. A second version is based on criticism expressed about the feeling of unfairness concerning aid targeted at refugees and not host communities. And the third and last version proposed not to label Syrians as refugees, but instead as residents. Yet this labelling as residents did not imply equal treatment as citizens with a Lebanese nationality, because focus was still put on safe repatriation.

One factor that was mentioned in the literature review and touched upon in the data collection is yet left undiscussed. The role of the media was not referred to directly within the questions, however it did come up. The literature review notes that Lebanese media is known for reporting on refugees in relation to threats to the sectarian balance in the country and the sense of security. Two activists referred to this trend as well. The Lihaqqi activist talked about media framing refugees in the protests by overstating the presence of foreigners.<sup>221</sup> If they would find one Syrian it would be portrayed as though the entire protest was infiltrated by this nationality. Consequently this would deter many non-Lebanese from attending, particularly Syrians or Palestinians that could face additional risks due to their status in Lebanon. Another reference to the media came from the activist from 'An Haqak Dafie, who voiced some criticism towards the fact that the media continued to report only marginally on the protests and their demands.<sup>222</sup> Thus, since the media had a big role previously in spreading the government's rhetoric, including exploitation of refugee presence for political gains, it remains an important factor to take into account. Also during the October uprising this effect of the media remained and continues to shape

<sup>219</sup> R Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity' (1991) 4 *Journal of Refugee Studies* 39; F De Zwart, 'The Dilemma of Recognition: Administrative Categories and Cultural Diversity' (2005) 34 *Theory and Society* 138.

<sup>220</sup> S Deets, 'Consociationalism, Clientelism, and Local Politics in Beirut: Between Civic and Sectarian Identities' (2018) 24 *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 133, 135.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with activist, Lihaqqi (online, 2 June 2020).

<sup>222</sup> Interview with activist, 'An Haqak Dafie (online, 6 June 2020).

people's perspectives. Hence an important topic for further study could thus be the media's framing of the protests as well as Syrian refugees in the country.

Although a media analysis was outside of the scope of this study, a lot of insight was gained from the heart of the October uprising through interviews with activists. The methodology allowed for thick description based on the experiences of experts on the topic. Of course there are inexhaustible amounts of perspectives and persons that could have been included, but by allowing for ten in-depth interviews at least a certain level of data saturation has been achieved. This does not take away that the October uprising is still ongoing at the time of writing and the protests need to be understood as amorphous, partly due to the multitude of positions within them. Besides this, allowing the 'art of presence', as described by Bayat, to guide the data collection on the place of Syrian refugees in the protests narratives, the perspectives of Syrians themselves were not included.<sup>223</sup> On the one hand, this decision was made because this study's topic of interest concerns the perception of refugees by Lebanese within the protests. As such, a contribution could be made to the study on the October uprising, where Lebanese activists have a central role. On the other hand, this did not allow for Syrians themselves to provide insights on how they perceive themselves and the effect of the Syrian influx on topics such as economy, politics and security. Nonetheless, earlier studies have noted a reluctance on behalf of Syrians in Lebanon to discuss Lebanese politics.<sup>224</sup> So while a crucial point in this thesis' argumentation was the sharing of realities of Lebanese and Syrians that are being opposed in the protests, there was little room for recognition of the experiences of Syrian refugees within the Lebanese October uprising.

<sup>223</sup> A Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam UP 2010) 12.

<sup>224</sup> Z El Hélou, *Political Participation of Refugees: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) 2018).

8.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded without question that tides in Lebanon are changing. The wall of fear that has been holding the population back for years is broken, allowing people to speak up for themselves and against the government's inadequacies in providing for them. The exact political outcomes of this change are to be foreseen, yet on a social level a change has been set in motion. The Lebanese people's mindset has changed. Rather than relying on one's sectarian party, a belief in the need for government representing the interests of all Lebanese equally is growing. As a consequence of this, opposing the government and its narrative equals opposing the main actor that contributed to hostile feelings concerning Syrian refugees in the country. For populist motives, parties within the political establishment utilised the Syrian presence for political benefits. This in combination with a lack of policy concerning how to host and manage the Syrian refugees in the country increased the negative feelings among the population for years. Although the protest groups and parties recognise the role of the government and the media in shaping the perception of refugees in Lebanon, this does not equate itself with a more positive perception. Hence, there is some shift to be seen when it comes to the perception of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by protest groups, but it is not a difference between night and day for all groups represented in this research.

The October uprising works towards a Lebanon without corruption and led by principles of good governance. For many this entails a human rights-based approach that strives for equality in rights and obligations for all. At the baseline, this is something seemingly shared across protest groups and regions. When delving into details however, the inclusion or exclusion of non-Lebanese in this proposed future for Lebanon differ per group. While indeed some believe a systematic change ought

to imply a systematic change for all, others see Syrian refugees as a separate issue. An issue that indeed needs to be dealt with better than the government has been doing for the past years, but still an issue in need of a particular political solution. Based on the results of the study it can be said that many issues previously associated with the refugee presence are less at the fore within the protests. In particular security issues or Syrian refugees as a threat to the sectarian balance and political stability of the regime depend on the state's discourse and related media. Consequently, the October uprising marks a shift away from these topics. Furthermore, within the October uprising there seems to be more room for considering Syrian refugees having the potential to contribute to the Lebanese economy, albeit that this is not something shared across all groups. At the same time, the strain on the economy and public infrastructure remains a worrisome impact of the Syrian refugee presence in the minds of many Lebanese, also within the October uprising. Particularly in the context of not only the political instability resulting from the protests, but also during a dire financial crisis and a global pandemic, the strain on the economy becomes more worrisome. While it cannot be concluded that this directly translates into hostility towards refugees, it does imply that conditions for both Syrian refugees and increasing numbers of vulnerable Lebanese are worsening at scary fast rates.

The decision to opt for a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews might limit the generalisability of this study to draw conclusions about the October uprising as a whole. Nevertheless the insights gained through data collection allow for a detailed account of the October uprising, its initial demands and expected outcomes. The question of whether a shift in popular perception of Syrian refugees will translate into a shift in their lived realities in the country is something that would require further research, possibly further in the future. This also relies on the maturity of political groups and how coordination between opposition groups evolves beyond the October uprising as an immediate contest moment. When it comes to whether the October uprising goes beyond opposing a government to introducing a new value system in the country, as of now that seems to be the case. The extent to which this new value system also encompasses those considered as the Other in society, taking Syrian refugees as a case study, is something dependent on the group and one's personal background. Yet the change from one's perception of refugees being strongly guided by the political arena seems to be over, as the October uprising paved the road for open opposition to the political status quo and their populist rhetoric.

## APPENDIX 1

## SAMPLE PROTEST GROUPS

Organisation	Founded	Vision
Marsad Shaabi (المرصد الشعبي لمحاربة الفساد)	2016	Marsad Shaabi's was launched from the 'We Want Accountability' (Badna Nhasib) group that was central in the 2015 garbage crisis. Since then Marsad Shaabi has worked with a focus on accountability to counter corruption.
Massirat Watan (مسيرة وطن)	2017	Massirat Watan's first activity was a march through Lebanon to represent their vision of building a country where citizens actively participate.
Lihaqqi (لِحَقِّي)	2018	Lihaqqi was founded before the 2018 elections. They consider themselves a political and social change movement and take participatory democracy as an approach in political action.
'An Haqak Dafie (عن حقك دافع)	2019	'An Haqak Dafie is a civil movement group of independent individuals that organised themselves after 17 October based on a shared disgust for the corruption and sectarianism in Lebanon. Hence they call for a government that respects the most basic human, social and economic human rights.
Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) (الحزب الشيوعي اللبناني)	1924	The Lebanese Communist Party has long roots in Lebanese political history through participation in various social movements and elections (from 1943 onwards).

Organisation	Founded	Vision
Mouwatoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla (MMFD) (مواطنون ومواطنات في دولة)	2016	MMFD was founded prior to the 2016 municipal elections, where they presented lists of independent candidates that emphasised their responsibilities on the basis of their citizenship and not their allegiance to any community. Since then MMFD has been working towards a secular, democratic state.
The National Bloc (الكتلة الوطنية)	1943	The National Bloc goes back in Lebanese political history to the parliamentary elections of 1943. After having gone through many reforms, as of now they are a secular party working to build a citizenship-based nation.
Binaa Dawla (إئتلاف بناء الدولة)	2020	Binaa Dawla is a coalition of groups and parties active in the protests that rejects the sectarian political system and outlines on what provisions change ought to occur. Firstly, Binaa Dawla focusses on urgent measures to counter the financial crisis. Next they are based on a strategic plan for reform of the political, economic and financial system of Lebanon.
Beirut Madinati (بيروت مدينتي)	2016	Beirut Madinati was founded to contest the municipal elections of Beirut in 2016. They intend to build a non-sectarian political alternative aimed at achieving social, economic and political human rights, while preserving environmental and cultural heritage.
Saida Tantafed (صيدا تنتفض)	2019	Saida Tantafed arose as part of the October uprising and is a new public group based in Saida.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today. As you know, I am Charlotte, a master's student at Université Saint Joseph on the topic of human rights and democracy in the Arab world. The purpose of my current research is to write a paper on the Lebanese protests, with a focus on the representativeness of the demands.

I want to reaffirm that you should feel completely free in your answers. With your acceptance I would like to record our conversation, yet this is only to enable me to analyse the data and will not be shared with any third parties. This research follows the Chatham House rule, so your name will not be mentioned, and you are completely free to skip any questions you are not comfortable with answering.

Of course I invited you for this interview because your perspective is valuable to my understanding of the protests. So although I did some background research on you and your work, I will include some quite general questions to avoid the risk of making any wrong assumptions.

1. Could you please introduce yourself? (probes) age, current place of residence, place of birth, group / network, when did your activism start?
  - a. Would you consider yourself as part of the *thumar* (revolutionaries)? Why / why not?
2. We know that there were many spots for protests across the country. Where were you the most active? Why?
3. What role did you play in the protests? Please tell me more about this.

4. From your perspective, what has happened in Lebanon since 17 October 2019?
  - a. What do you think of these events?
  - b. In your opinion, how do these protests differ from earlier protests in Lebanon?
5. For your group or for you personally, what are the three main demands of the protests? Why? How have these been developed?
  - a. On a scale from one to ten (one being not aligned at all, and ten being fully aligned) how aligned to these demands are various *thawra* across the country? What makes say that?
6. In your opinion, what is the typical profile of a revolutionary?
  - a. On a scale from one to ten, to what extent do you feel that *thawra* from different regions and background think alike? What makes say that?
7. How do you feel about these similarities / differences? How do they impact the protests?

We know that Lebanon is the country with the highest number of refugees per capita. This mainly concerns the Syrian refugees, who have fled the war in Syria since 2011 onwards.

8. How do you personally feel towards this issue? Why? (probes: how were you personally impacted by the refugee influx: financial instability, difficulty to find employment, sense of safety, etc)
9. In your opinion, what has been the position of the *thawra* in regards to this issue? How was the Syrian refugees issue represented?
  - a. Were there any variations to this position throughout the protests? Why and how?
  - b. What is the position of your group about this?

10. The literature review has shown mounting resentment, both at the political and popular sides, over the Syrian refugee issue, whereas some people, including activists and human rights organisations have tried to mitigate this through petitions and other actions. In your opinion, should the *thawra* take account of that and possibly address this issue from a human rights perspective, or rather focus on internal issues related to corruption and governance?
  - a. Was this debate opened at any point during the protests? If yes, please explain how did this happen. If not, please explain why.
  - b. What arguments and counter-arguments are being used to support either position?
  - c. How do you personally feel about this?
11. Closing question: Let us say we are now in 2040, and you are giving an interview about the 2020 protests in Lebanon. One of the questions says: what major change did the protests introduce in the mind-set of the Lebanese people, 20 years ago, what would be your answer? Why?
12. Anything else you would like to share with me?

Thank you very much for your time.

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