Competing Logics of Security toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Lebanon

Syrian refugee flows have incited a vast array of fears, anxieties, and concerns around the world. Although almost ninety-five percent of Syrian refugees have fled to other countries in the Middle East such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (UNHCR 2019), the Syrian refugee crisis has also motivated a surge in fear and suspicion of outsiders in European countries. Anti-immigration rhetoric, previously unarticulated or expressed only in private, began to dominate the mainstream political discourses in many countries. Seizing the moment, far-right politicians have proven extremely adept at tapping into and capitalizing on people's collective anxieties. As a result, ultra-nationalism has been transformed into a politically promising ideology in many liberal democracies including Italy, France, Germany, Hungary, and Sweden.

Despite the liberal pride of the universality of human rights, the perception of "human" and "culture" is still highly territorialized and rooted in the nation-state order (Zeno 2017). We are living in a world where goods move across international borders far more freely than human beings which in a way attests to the fact that economic liberalism has been more successful than political liberalism. It is impossible to conceptualize the ethical responsibilities of human communities and their political practices toward refugees in any other way under the strict logic of sovereignty. States hold on to the right to regulate entry as a fundamental concomitant of their sovereignty (Zolberg 1983) and also, either explicitly or implicitly, recognize homogeneity as a prerequisite for peace, law, and order (Bigo 2002, 67).

Justice in an ideal world would require that one's life chances not be dependent on arbitrary facts, so the freedom to move across borders would be regarded as a basic right. But, this is only agreeable in theory, for it is a political non-starter within the nation-state system (Price 2009, 2). Refugees, hence, provide a sobering reminder of the limits of liberal solidarist change within the international society (Hurrell 2007).

Displacement only becomes an international issue when it poses an imminent and ostensible threat to the protection of borders. Refugees are a direct but unintended consequence of the nation-states' hierarchical and layered approach toward human security that prioritizes the security of "the citizen" over that of "the non-citizen," and territorializes the humanitarian protection (Anderson 2006, Hansen 2009). Therefore, any systemic and durable solution to the problems resulting from massive human flows would require the consideration of non-territorial conceptions of state, sovereignty, and human protection.

Legal Protection of Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Lebanon

The Turkish state's approach toward refugees has switched from non-recognition (2011-2014) to recognition (2014-2016) and then to integration (2016-present). When Syrians first crossed the border to Turkey, the Turkish government viewed the presence of refugees only as a temporary condition and therefore did not grant them conventional refugee status or any type of protection status until 2014. Refugees were only recognized as "*misafir*" (guests). Although most of the refugees in Turkey today are from non-European states, Turkey's obligations under the refugee convention have geographical limitations and only apply to European asylum seekers. More than 3.5 million Syrian refugees now residing in Turkey have temporary protection status and can stay there until they are

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provided permanent resettlement in a third country. Although refugees have access to primary and secondary education, almost 350,000 Syrian children (40% of the school-aged Syrian children) do not attend schools in the country. Additionally, despite new legislation passed in 2016 that authorizes Syrian refugees to apply for a work permit, to date only a few thousand of them have obtained one.

On the other hand, until several restrictive measures were introduced in January 2015, the Lebanese government had maintained open borders with Syria and allowed the UNHCR to register Syrian refugees. A series of inactions characterized Lebanon's early response to the Syrian refugee influx such as non-encampment, no policy, and disassociation (Mourad 2017). The presence of Syrian refugees was also not presented as a critical security threat in Lebanon between 2011 and 2015. Furthermore, in the face of state inaction, the international institutions, mainly the UNHCR, emerged as the primary institution addressing the Syrian refugee issues (Janmyr 2017). However, as the war intensified and the number of refugees fleeing to Lebanon increased, the inaction of the state was replaced with reactionary policies, which resulted in securitization of the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon in the following years. Among these policies were strict entry regulations, limitations of the sectors in which Syrians could labor, high residency permit renewal fees, suspension of UNHCR's registration of Syrian refugees, and perennial demands for refugees return to Syria. After the UNHCR's registration of Syrians as "refugees" (*lajiun*) was suspended, the Lebanese state informally labeled refugees as "displaced people" (*nazihun*). All these categories produce various forms of ordering with a set of implications for what Syrians may do, and what types of rights and protections they have access to (Janmyr and Mourad 2017, 545).

Politics of the Syrian Civil War and Refugees in Turkey and Lebanon

Domestic political actors in Turkey and Lebanon have operated on competing logics of security throughout the Syrian civil war. In other words, they differed substantively in terms of what constituted a threat, whose security was at stake and what kinds of policies should be implemented in response. For instance, in Turkey, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) envisioned a Syria without Bashar al-Assad and supported the opposition in an effort to protect Syrians against state persecution. On the other hand, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) viewed the Turkmen community (Syrian citizens of Turkish origin residing in Northwest Syria near the border) as the only strategic group that Turkey should support in Syria. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), mainly recognized as the defender of the rights of the Kurdish minority in the country, prioritized the protection of the Kurdish Autonomous region, known as Rojava. The YPG (People's Defense Units), in their view, successfully battled against all of the radical and authoritarian forces in Syria, including ISIS and the Syrian regime, carving out its own self-governing entity, which is anti-sectarian, pluralistic, and democratic. The government, in their opinion, aggravates the sectarian violence in Syria by backing up the radical groups and by fomenting hatred against the Alawites, a sect of Islam primarily centered in Syria.

On the other hand, in Lebanon, Hezbollah maintained that Israel, its allies, and *takfiris* (radical Sunni groups such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra) were posing an existential threat to the Lebanese sovereignty and security, and if these forces were not defeated, they could destroy Lebanon (Hazbun 2016). Whereas the members of the anti-Syrian regime, March 14 alliance, viewed Hezbollah's militarization and participation in the Syrian Civil War as the most important security threat to Lebanon's integrity as well as a violation of the country's policy of dissociation adopted in 2012. These domestic actors' stances toward the Syrian conflict were reflected in their attitudes toward refugees as well. Among these domestic political actors, the ones that opposed the Assad regime supported Syrian refugees, whereas the ones that supported the regime opposed Syrian refugees' presence in their country.

In an attempt to justify their preferred policies and strategies toward Syrian refugees in particular and the Syrian Civil War in general, all these political parties made references to different historical contexts, events, memories, and images. For instance, the ruling party (AKP) in Turkey employed religious analogies and likened the Syrian refugees to *Muhajirun* (early Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina due to oppression) and themselves to *Ansar* (early Muslims from Medina who offered help to *Muhajirun*. However the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) viewed the Syrian civil war as the next phase of the US's Greater Middle East Project (Devran and Ozcan 2016)They criticized the ruling party for activating a process that might result in a total breakdown of the Syrian regime and rise of a wide range of non-state actors such as ISIS, YPG (People's Defense

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Unit), and FSA (Free Syrian Army) in the region increasing Turkey's vulnerability to ethnic insurgency and terrorist attacks (Devran and Ozcan 2016).

Similarly, in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement and the Kataeb Party invoked the Palestinian refugee experience in opposition to the creation of formal refugee camps for Syrians. In contrast, the Future Movement and Progressive Socialist Party reminded the Lebanese public of the Syrian hospitality during the Israeli aggression in 2006 to increase the public's support over Syrian refugees. The multiplicity of security and insecurity conceptions and historical narratives in these countries demonstrate how the meaning of security for an actor is intersubjective and derived from how it conceives of its identity in relation to other domestic actors operating on the same political scene.

Despite the Turkish government's pro-refugee discourse, the public's discontent with refugees, as supported by the polling data, has grown over the years and contributed to intercommunal conflicts. The public's discontent has also impacted the political party discourses as well as the election results. Some maintain that the public's hostile sentiments toward refugees helped Ekrem Imamoglu, the Republican People's Party's candidate for mayor of Istanbul, win the 2019 local election (Yurdakul 2019). On the other hand, a group of political actors in Lebanon, namely, members of the pro-Syrian regime March 8 movement, continuously request Syrian refugees' return to some of the regime-controlled areas, claimed to be safe but not accepted as safe by the international community. Local authorities in Lebanon have become increasingly hostile-imposing curfews on refugees and restricting their freedom of movement in the country (Davison 2016).

Conclusions

The gap between actuality and what the Lebanese and Turkish governments desire to be true regarding the conditions of Syrian refugees is increasingly widening. Although Lebanon hosts half a million Palestinian refugees, a million Syrian refugees and thousands of Iraqi refugees, a section of Lebanese politicians continue to claim that Lebanon is not a country of asylum or resettlement. Similarly, the Turkish government tends to ignore the growing discontentment with refugees that occasionally results in intercommunal conflicts.

Syrian refugees are unlikely and unable to return home, however policymakers in these countries still avoid identifying their integration as a possible course of action due to fears of public reaction. Instead, they focus on their possible return to Syria. In both Lebanon and Turkey, the public is not ready to hear that refugees might stay permanently.This prevents the development of serious discussions around long-term coexistence with, and integration of Syrian refugees. Lebanon's historical legacy with Palestinian refugees and delicate sectarian balance of power system have produced a cross-party opposition to naturalization and permanent residency of Syrian refugees. Residency and naturalization are essential to the legal integration of refugee communities but might become sensitive issues in Lebanon because they might endanger the country's sectarian power sharing system established with the Taif agreement in 1989.

Political structures shape actors' identities and interests. The Lebanese political system breeds a perennial state of insecurity as it incentivizes political parties and movements to become the dominant representatives of their respective sectarian communities and distribute rights and services along sectarian lines (Cammett 2013). Under this system, Syrian refugees only reinforce the sectarian identities and divisions and test the country's fault lines. The question often for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is not naturalization or integration but maintaining good relations with the Lebanese state and public. Any long-term solution to the refugee predicament in Lebanon would require the reconfiguration of the confessional power-sharing model and depoliticization of sectarian identities where distribution of political and bureaucratic posts no longer relies on sectarian membership and political parties offer social benefits across different groups and operate as national actors.

Political issues might be resolved through elections, preference shifting or alliance formation but identity-based conflicts are very resistant to change (Chandra 2012). Although multi-sectarian coalitions (Pro-Syrian Regime March 8 and Anti-Syrian Regime March 14 alliances) have shown the variability of the political salience of sectarian identity in Lebanon, this variation has been the exception rather than the rule. Additionally, transnational sectarian loyalties undermine Lebanon's autonomy turning it into a geopolitical battleground for foreign powers and their non-state or

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sub-state proxies (Hazbun 2016). Therefore, Lebanon and refugees' primary security interest lies in the centralization of authority and expansion of the coercive powers of the state (Hazbun 2016).

On the other hand, Turkey still lacks a grand strategy for the integration of Syrian refugees. The solutions are temporary arising from necessitates of the moment. For example, hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, who were initially allowed to leave the bordering cities and refugee camps and reside in the metropolitan cities, are ordered to return to the cities where they were registered or face forcible transfer by the governor's office in Istanbul, which has produced a new set of anxieties for internal displacement within a host country.

Such temporary measures hinder economic and social integration of refugees and push them toward legal invisibility. Many Western countries have often claimed that integration of Syrian refugees could be easier in the neighboring countries as they share cultural similarities with refugees. However, as conditions of Syrian refugees in these countries indicate, they overlooked how economic incapacity, sectarian fault lines, domestic actors' transnational political loyalties and high levels of political polarization could engender competing logics of security and increase refugees' vulnerability to instability.

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