



Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon's Informality

Exploring the situation of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.
How informality affects their position within Lebanese society
and their relationship with the Lebanese host community.

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We were forced, this is the key point.
We are forced to stay here, we don't have a choice.
– Rola (30)

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Cover Image by Anna Puntman

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Abstract

In 2011, civil war broke out in Syria, which caused people to flee the country. A large portion of these Syrian refugees ended up in neighbouring country Lebanon. Initially, the Lebanese government was welcoming, but it became more reluctant as the numbers started to increase. The government has also offered very little assistance to the refugees. Instead, Syrian refugees are forced to provide for themselves and rely on humanitarian organisations. This situation has become very problematic both for the refugees and the Lebanese host community. Tensions have been rising, as have concerns about Lebanon's fragile political stability. Syrian women are particularly vulnerable in this situation. This thesis explores the case of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon by linking it to the concept of informality. Lebanon's society and political system are highly informal and this has influenced the situation of Syrian women. Informality increases vulnerability and insecurity in the lives of these women. It has become clear that Lebanon needs more assistance in dealing with this situation. If the international community does not realize the gravity of this situation, it could deteriorate rapidly.

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1. Introduction

In March 2011, civil war broke out in Syria and millions of people have since fled the country. Neighbouring country Lebanon has taken in many Syrians, currently making it the country with the highest percentage of refugees in the world (Rabil, 2016). Lebanon is a country with a complex history, which was at the time, and currently still is recovering from its own conflict(s) (Martin, 2014). The Lebanese government has accepted Syrian refugees into the country, but has not been willing to provide them with assistance or protection. This has not only made the situation problematic for the Syrians, but has also put a lot of pressure on the Lebanese society, and causes concerns for the stability of Lebanon and the surrounding region (Rabil, 2016).

Significance & Research Objectives

This thesis will explore the situation of female Syrian refugees in Lebanon by applying the concept of informality to the case. Syrian refugees are not organized in the traditional setting of refugee camps, but are instead spread out through the country. The majority is not able to obtain citizenship and is therefore forced to live in informality (Turner, 2015).

The phenomenon of refugees living outside of camps is becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide (Martin, 2015). The Syrian refugee crisis is quite recent and most research has focused on practical and structuralist assessments of the situation of these refugees and the effect of their presence on host country Lebanon. However, this approach lacks depth on the experiences of refugees themselves. The aim of this research is to explore the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with a focus on the individual perspective of the refugee, rather than the perspective of an outsider on refugees as part of groups. The reason for this focus, is that it is able to provide more detailed information on the intricacies of their situation through exploration of motivations, emotions and rationale behind decision making processes. It can also help discover which possibilities exist for people living in informality and in which ways it excludes them. The research focuses on Syrian women specifically, because they face unique challenges and vulnerabilities in Lebanon. The main question guiding this research is:

How does informality affect the lives of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon?

Societal Relevance

This research revolves around the problem that extremely high numbers of Syrian people have been forced to seek refuge in Lebanon. There are two sides to this problem, one applying to refugees themselves and the other affecting the entire country and region.

Various humanitarian organizations have voiced their concerns about the precarious situation the refugees are in. This includes issues like unemployment, poverty, lack of access to health care and education (Turner, 2015; Rabil, 2016). These kinds of debates have generally prioritized groups over the individual and link the groups to concerns over security, budgets, health, etcetera (Turner, 2015; Sanyal, 2015; Rabil, 2016). The data collection for this research will focus on what the consequences of this situation are for individuals.

The focus of this research will allow people to tell their own story. It will provide space for them to explain what is most important to them personally, how their individual lives are affected and what they believe would improve their situation. This is important because it gives new information on how informality is experienced in daily life and how it influences people's opportunities and rationales behind their decision-making process. This is not only important in order to gain better understanding of the situation the refugees themselves are in, but also the effect they have or will have on their environment.

The fact that they are living in informality, affects all aspects of their lives, influences which possibilities they have and can help explain their actions. This is useful information when addressing the refugee crisis in Lebanon. It will explain to which degree informality is influencing the situation and therefore addresses the effects of the government's policies. It will provide insights into how assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon could and should be improved. It will shed light on the current state of humanitarian responses to the Syrian refugee crisis.

The research will then address how this group of refugees connects to the rest of the population. Using the concept of informality creates a better understanding on how various groups in the society are connected to one another. This is not only important for the refugees, but also for the Lebanese population and other groups in society. If an individual finds him or herself in a challenging situation, it might cause them to resort to certain coping mechanisms, which will ultimately create problems for more people.

Tension between refugees, Lebanese people and other groups, most significantly Palestinian refugees, has been increasing. It has been described as one of the biggest current sources of concern and frustration within Lebanon (Rabil, 2016). The situation has the potential to damage Lebanon's internal stability. Internationally, there are great concerns about Lebanon's vulnerable socio-political balance and about what the possible consequences might be for the region if this balance is disturbed.

This research will be highly qualitative and it will be hard to make any generalizations. However, it can provide insights into some of the nuances and intricacies that are important to understanding the relationship between the refugees and the local population. It can further show how informality may or may not contribute to this tension through the way it influences refugees' opportunities and decision-making processes. It will also shed light on what the effects of the government's policy of non-encampment are, and whether it contributes to their goals or ultimately damages Lebanon and the region. This information will be a valuable addition to the existing debate on the international response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

Scientific Contribution

The significance of this thesis lies in the relationship between the various elements. The concept of informality will provide a better understanding of the situation of Syrians in Lebanon and how we perceive life in refuge. In turn, this specific case will provide a more thorough understanding of the concept informality.

The concept of informality has been applied mostly to the urban poor. The link between informality and refugees has been made only recently. However, this link will become increasingly relevant as refugee camps are no longer the international standard. Refugees are mixing with the urban poor, as these groups no longer exist in separate spaces. Refugees therefore experience similar forms of informality to the urban poor, but their situation is not the same.

In the case of Lebanon, informality applies to the entire population. Understanding this will provide new perspectives on informality. It will clarify the fact that the nature of informality is different in every context and variable over time. It is not possible to establish one fixed definition that fits in every context. However, creating a larger body of work in the form of context-specific case studies can help explore various aspects of informality and how it affects

individual lives. It can also help determine which aspects of informality affect people in positive ways and how we can find useful ways of working with it. It can also reveal the negative effects and where informality leaves people vulnerable and in need of assistance.

Exploring the concept from an interpretive standpoint adds new dimensions to the concept, how people perceive its meaning and experience its effects from within (Demmers, 2012). In order to determine how to address informality, it is important to know more about its nature and to further explore its effects. Studying it solely from an outsider perspective does not provide enough information. In order to gain better understanding of the effects of informality on refugees, but ultimately also on the host country and the region, it is necessary to know more about how it affects individuals.

Traditionally, informality has been approached in relation to economic processes. This thesis will explore the concept on more levels, recognizing that it encompasses all aspects of an individual's life. This will provide a more holistic perspective on informality, providing a richer understanding of the concept.

Outline

The following theoretical framework of the thesis will explore existing research on the Lebanese case and the theoretical concepts that are involved in the thesis. The methodology chapter will address how this research is designed and will elaborate on the intricacies of the research process. The empirical chapter will present the most important results of the data collection. In the final chapter, I will discuss theoretical and practical implications of this research.

2. Theoretical Framework

Context

Lebanese Society & Politics

Lebanon has a tumultuous history and while the last decade has seen relative stability, the country remains at risk. The country suffered a civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 and a more recent conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. These periods of political and civil unrest have caused massive displacement and destruction throughout the country, have increased poverty levels in Lebanon and have also contributed to existing sectarian divides (Martin, 2014, p.12).

Two factors have emerged as very important elements in understanding how this came about: sectarianism and the weakness of the government. The relationship between these factors is a two-way street. Lebanese society consists of different religious sects and many important political and societal processes are arranged according to these sects. The government consists of a power-sharing construct between these sects (Cammatt & Issar, 2010; Maktabi, 1999). However, the individual sects are more dominant than the government as a whole. The dominance of these sects prevents the government from playing a stronger role. At the same time, the weakness of the government allows the sects to maintain their dominance.

Many Lebanese citizens do not trust or rely on their government to function properly (Alijla, 2017; Cherri et al., 2016). They do not believe the government is able to guide the country towards positive progress. Instead, each group in the society relies on its own sects. Many Lebanese people do not necessarily believe that this system is ideal, but that there is no alternative available. There exists a fear that if people stop supporting their sects, it will harm their situation (Cammatt & Issar, 2010; Alijla, 2017). Alija (2017) argues that this has caused a permanent lack of trust in the government among Lebanese society. The intended sharing of power is flawed, because the division of power is not as equal as it should be, which causes many tensions within society (Cammatt & Issar, 2010). Ever since the 1932 census, Lebanon's political system has been dominated by Christian Maronites (Maktabi, 1999). The fact that Muslims are actually a majority if various Muslim groups were to be combined, has always been considered problematic by the Christians (Martin, 2014: 9).

Dynamics between Groups: (Syrian) Refugees in Lebanon

The precarious political balance in Lebanon partly explains why the government is very reluctant to grant Lebanese citizenship to Syrians. Obtaining citizenship is possible in theory, but too complicated or unaffordable for most Syrians (Turner, 2015). If this specific group of Syrian refugees were to be granted citizenship, it would distort the political balance, which gives other groups reasons to worry about their position in society (Martin, 2014).

In 2017, a report produced by inter alia the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), stated that they had officially registered over a million Syrian refugees in Lebanon (UNHCR et al., 2017). The real number of refugees is estimated to be even higher, over 1.5 million, but it is difficult to establish this as many refugees enter the country illegally and are therefore not registered (Rabil, 2016). This means that Syrians now make up at least a quarter of the Lebanese population (Fawaz, 2017).

Lebanon is a non-signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, meaning that it is not obliged to provide any legal protection to the refugees under international law (UNHCR, 2011; Turner, 2015). The government has also deliberately classified Syrians as not refugees, but as displaced, meaning they have no legal rights in Lebanon (Sanyal, 2017). Syrians have been accepted within the Lebanese borders, but are not residing in official camps. Instead they are spread out through the country and most have to organize their settlement without government assistance. This approach might appear unstructured, but the government's actions are based on a deliberate strategy (Turner, 2015; Sanyal, 2017). The Lebanese government has been carrying out a policy of non-encampment, allowing the Syrians to become part of society in certain ways, while simultaneously excluding them in others (Turner, 2015).

The way Syrian refugees have been received and treated by the Lebanese government and host community, can be partially explained by certain aspects of Lebanon's recent history, namely Lebanon's experience with other groups of refugees and the relationship between Syria and Lebanon before the war.

To start with the first aspect, Lebanon has had to deal with large influxes of refugees over the years. Palestinians have constituted the largest group of refugees ever since the first Arab-Israeli war in 1947/1948 (Martin, 2014, p.9). The Lebanese experience with Palestinians is generally considered negative and the refugee situation as unresolved (Martin, 2014). Fearful narratives exist within the Lebanese population about Palestinians and the camps they inhabit (Martin,

2014; Turner, 2015). A large part of the Lebanese society blames Palestinian refugees for the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War (Sanyal, 2017: 120). This partly explains why the Lebanese government was very reluctant to allow official camps to be established for Syrians. There also exists a fear in the government that encampment would make it more likely for Syrians to become a permanent part of the society, which is considered a repetition of the “Palestinian problem” (Turner, 2015). One could also argue that the opposite is more likely, that Syrians are less likely to stay if they are kept separate from Lebanese society. But the belief is that if people are not taken care of and have no possibilities, they will eventually leave voluntarily.

The second aspect is something that is crucial to understand. Syrians were already an important part of the informal Lebanese work force before the Syrian war, or rather before former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated in 2005 (Chalcraft, 2007). The blame for the assassination was put on the Syrian regime, which caused a highly tense situation. This situation forced people to flee back to Syria, leaving a gap in the work force. The numbers of Syrian workers in Lebanon fluctuated throughout the years as result of different developments within Lebanon, most notably the 2006 war (Chalcraft, 2007). However, only since the Syrian refugee crisis have the numbers been restored to what they were before the assassination (Turner, 2015). Important actors in the Lebanese labour market have benefited from the presence of Syrian workers.

Tensions

The relationship between Syrians and their host country was initially (relatively) good, despite grievances that still exist as a result from the time the Syrian regime was present in Lebanon (Rabil, 2016). The Lebanese have been called exceptionally welcoming by humanitarian organisations that are dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis and have assisted people with rebuilding their lives. However, the fact that the number of Syrians entering Lebanon keeps growing has put pressure on Lebanese society and has changed intergroup relationships. Tensions and hostilities are increasing and concerns about clashes are rising (Turner, 2015; Rabil, 2016).

Lebanon is a densely populated country and the refugee influx increased pressure on Lebanon’s vulnerable economy and social systems. It has enlarged the workforce in Lebanon, which has lowered wages and has made workers more vulnerable (Turner, 2015: 388). Periods of political unrest and economic hardship have fuelled migration within its borders, adding to existing pressure on the more densely populated areas. These are often the same places where refugees

settle, causing them to integrate into some of the poorest Lebanese communities (Martin, 2014; Rabil, 2016).

There are also many logistical problems, such as a lack of housing, a garbage crisis and a poorly planned electrical system which is not able to cope with increasing demands. A majority of the Lebanese society does not agree with the non-encampment policy and, despite the reputation of Palestinian camps, would prefer it if official camps were established, partly for this reason (Turner, 2015: 390). There are many valid arguments to be made against providing relief to refugees through the means of official camps, based on humanitarian values (Turner, 2015). However, the situation in which Syrians in Lebanon are currently living is also highly problematic (Sanyal, 2017).

Syrian Women in Lebanon

This thesis is focusing on Syrian refugees, women in particular. There are various reasons for this, some of which will be clarified in the Methodology chapter. What is important to highlight here, is how the situation of Syrian women, differs from that of Syrian men in Lebanon. This will help explain why the focus of this research lies with women.

Amnesty International (2016a) published a report about Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. Their main observation was that Syrian women in Lebanon are at risk of human rights violations and abuses, as well as an increased risk of gender-based violence. They argue that women who are the head of their household are particularly vulnerable (2016, p. 5). The report states that: “One fifth of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon are headed by women. ... Some refugee women who are heads of their household in Lebanon are widows, some are divorced and some have husbands who have either stayed in Syria or have sought asylum in other countries. Others have husbands who are missing, forcibly disappeared or detained in Syria.” (Amnesty International, 2016a, p. 5).

Thorleifsson (2016) makes an interesting observation related to female-headed households. She explains that it is not considered normal for women in the Syrian society to work. However, after responsibility has fallen on them, their traditional gendered role has shifted, as they are now responsible for providing an income. This presents women with a unique set of challenges.

Various researchers have argued that Syrian women in Lebanon face higher vulnerability than men. This conclusion has been drawn in relation to a diversity of issues. Gender-based violence has been emphasized by many researchers as the most important threat facing Syrian refugee women (Assaf, 2017; Usta, 2016; Yasmine & Moughalian, 2016). Some researchers focus on health issues, specifically in combination with or as a result of gender-based violence (Spencer et al., 2015). Samari (2017) argues that women's health always disproportionately suffers in conflict settings.

In other research, gender-based violence is connected to broader vulnerability in terms of not being in charge of one's future, but instead having choices made by family members (DeJong et al., 2017; Mourtada, 2017). Yasmine & Moughalian (2016) argue that the Lebanese societal system makes Syrian refugees particularly vulnerable. They explain that the system was already lacking in terms of basic service provision for Lebanese citizens, and that it disproportionately disadvantages Syrian women, due to discrimination based on gender.

Lebanon in the region

Considering the situation of refugees in the Middle East (ME) and specifically Syrians was not a matter of personal interest, but also a matter of geopolitical relevance. Considering its recent history, Lebanon's political stability is not a given and the country is always subject to geopolitical developments in the larger ME region (OCHA, 2018). The large influx of refugees from Syria, has put a strain on a society that was already struggling to address its own socio-economic and political issues (Fawaz, 2017). There is a chance that Lebanon's fragile stability will not hold under this pressure, and that will eventually cause problems not only regionally, but also internationally (Rabil, 2016). Even though this research will not address all these geopolitical tensions, they clarify why there is a need to shine a light on this situation.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between Syria and Lebanon used to be relatively good. Besides the fact that various neighbours are not willing to take in as many, this relationship is also a reason why Lebanon has accepted so many refugees. The fact that Lebanon's sectarian tensions are very much connected to Syria's civil war is currently complicating the situation. The Syrian regime is involved in an anti-Israel, Shia allegiance. Together with Iran, they have been supporting Shia groups within Lebanon, specifically Hezbollah. Concerns are rising of a spill-over of the Syrian conflict towards Lebanon as extremist groups are becoming more active and Sunni-Shia divides are again increasing (Rabil, 2016).

Theoretical Concepts

The State of Exception

When reviewing existing literature on refugee lives, it seems there is no avoiding Agamben's (2005) interpretation of Carl Schmitt's (1922) concept, the state of exception. The state of exception is a space that exists outside any societal order as defined by law and politics (Agamben, 2005, p.1). The state of exception is controlled by the sovereign who deliberately excludes and produces bare life, in the name of state security (Martin, 2014). Bare life describes a situation where a human life is no longer attached to certain rights and/or values (Agamben, 2005; Martin, 2014).

These two concepts have been applied to refugees, but also a variety of other groups such as prisoners, colonized peoples, sex workers, people in concentration camps and the urban poor (Ramadan, 2012; Morin, 2013; Sanafi, 2013; McCann, 2014). Ramadan (2012, p.68) explains that part of the reason why Agamben has been so influential, is that he was the first to understand how the exception or exclusion of people has become an undeniable part of modern politics, that it defines the nature of a political body. The modern, and specifically the western, sovereign is characterized by the fact that he can exactly decide who is in- or excluded (Ramadan, 2012).

However, while exploring this concept, it becomes clear that as much as it has been referred to, it has also been criticized heavily. Some of the main critiques are that the concept is too essentialist, rigid, too theoretical, and that it could be more useful if its rules and boundaries were more flexible. Even in situations where people appear to be totally excluded, like prisons, there are always connections with the outside world. The state of exception might exist in theory, but it only rarely or arguably never applies to practice (Martin, 2014).

Fárias & Flores (2017, p.1108) argue that the Agamben's theory reduces people to nothing more than bodies and thereby confirms that which governments are trying to achieve instead of resisting it. Contrary to Agamben's (2005) argument, they contend that people always have rights, even if they might not be able to exercise them at all times. Many scholars continue to be inspired by Agamben's thinking, but instead of copying it directly, they attempt to redevelop the concept in order to make it more applicable to their own research (Ramadan, 2012; Martin, 2014; Fárias & Flores, 2017).

Diana Martin applied the state of exception to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. She reshaped Agamben's concept into something she calls *campscapes* (2014: 9), which explains that even when people are not entirely separated, they can still exist in exclusion. Palestinian refugees initially settled in camps throughout Lebanon, but were never completely separate from Lebanese society. As cities and towns grew, these camps became part of urban spaces and camp life increasingly merged with urban life. In some cases, camp life transcended the borders of the refugee space as the urban poor entered, for example for trade but also for accommodation.

Martin (2014: 10) also argues that exception is not necessarily only produced through the state and the law, as Agamben suggests. Instead, exception or exclusion is part of various spheres of social, economic and political life and it can also apply to other marginalized groups in society. This is specifically relevant in Lebanon, where divisions are strong and certain groups are more advantaged than others (Cammett & Issar, 2010). It is not necessarily only the state who can exercise exception, but any governing or authoritative body, whether legal or illegal (Roy, 2005; Ramadan, 2012).

In the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the state of exception also does not fully explain the situation. However, some elements of the state of exception are however useful, as Syrian refugees are excluded in many ways. Agamben's (2005) concept is valuable for understanding the deliberate political motivation and strategy behind certain policies (Roy, 2005) and how crises can be used as an excuse for certain behaviours that otherwise would not be accepted (Farías & Flores, 2017). The government has not created a total state of exception through the formal means of a camp, but is instead using exclusion as a tactic in order to avoid responsibility. It has attempted to exclude refugees, by making it nearly impossible for them to obtain citizenship. The concept of informality, being a more flexible and fluid theory, is more easily applicable. It describes the state of in-between in which Syrian refugees are currently residing. They do participate in public, social and economic life in many ways, but remain excluded in others (Martin, 2014; Sanyal, 2014).

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence ... and is unable or unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country or return there, for fear of persecution." (UNHCR, 2011, p.3). This definition still applies, but what it means to be a refugee in today's world is different from what it

was in the past. It becomes increasingly difficult to define the refugee, as their situation is constantly in motion. Informality offers a more flexible perspective on their situation.

Informality

The concept of informality originates from the field of economics. It has been explained as a range of economic activities that are not formally regulated through government (Roberts, 1994: 6; Sanyal, 2015: 31). During the 1970s, the concept was increasingly used in social sciences, which is when it began to include various aspects of (urban) life (Hart, 1973; Moser, 1978; Tokman, 1978; Bromley, 1978; Sanyal, 2015).

Some scholars have been using the term ‘informal moral economy’, implying that these types of exchanges also include certain moral codes, relations and behaviours (Gandhi, 2012). These economic activities exist side by side and are often connected to activities that are officially regulated by the state (Roberts, 1994: 6). While informality used to be considered as completely outside of any form of regulation or law, it is now more often regarded as connecting various spheres and spaces within society (Roy, 2015). More recently, Roy defined informality as “an organizing logic, a system that governs the process of urban transformation itself”, which already encompasses much more than just an economic system (2015: 148).

Turner (2015) and Sanyal (2017) have gone a step further and recognized that there is an element of intention, which they include in their interpretation of the concept. This is where it links with the state of exception, but Agamben’s interpretation only applies to total exclusion. The Lebanese government is using certain elements of the state of exception, namely keeping Syrians outside of the realm of citizenship. However, they have deliberately not placed them in a total state of exception, because this would mean they would not be able to benefit from their presence (Turner, 2015). A state of exception requires taking care of people in a way, for example through regulation, accommodation and financial support. This is exactly what the government is actively trying to avoid.

For these reasons, informality presented as a better option. It can be used as part of a deliberate political strategy, wherein a government uses deregulation in order to bear no responsibility for certain groups of people, but still exercises its control in specific ways. At the same time, it allows certain powerful figures to benefit from the Syrian presence, even if this hurts the Lebanese society (Rabil, 2006). They have created a space which is outside the official Lebanese society, in which Syrians now exist without rights or legal protection. Informality allows a government to

determine exactly what they are and are not willing to legitimize or allow (Sanyal, 2017: 120; Turner, 2015).

Informality is a complicated concept because it occupies a grey area with different degrees of in- and exclusion, legitimacy and illegitimacy. It does not necessarily only involve the poor and disadvantaged, but can also include other layers of society. Refugee spaces are emerging within this grey area, creating both positive and negative consequences for those living inside it (Sanyal, 2017).

On the one hand, informality can provide flexibilities and opportunities that might otherwise not have existed, for example in camps (Turner, 2015). However, it also creates a situation which is characterized by insecurity as these spaces are generally unrecognized, and it can create and exacerbate inequality and division within a society (Sanyal, 2017). Another way in which it increases vulnerability for refugees, is that these spaces are not officially within reach of humanitarian agencies, meaning that people do not automatically have access to their services, which can also increase inequalities between groups of refugees (Sanyal, 2017: 119).

(In)Security & Coping Mechanisms

The fluidity of the concept informality makes it very relevant for application to the situation of refugees, whose lives are unpredictable and in motion (Sanyal, 2015). Informality explains how Syrian refugees in Lebanon are in a state of in-between, which comes with high levels of insecurity. They exist inside the state of Lebanon and are in that sense part of a whole. However, they are not totally integrated into society and do not have access to certain elements that comprise Lebanese citizenship.

One of the most important problems this causes, is that Syrian refugees are not legally protected. However, within their capabilities, people have settled within Lebanon and have formed communities that are in some cases almost exclusively Syrian. If the situation in Syria stabilizes, people might start returning, but there is no telling if and when this will happen. In the meantime, Syrian children are being born in Lebanon without an official identity and are essentially stateless (Arendt, 1951; Howard, 2017). This begs the question whether the policy of non-encampment has really contributed to its envisioned goals or if it has created even bigger problems.

Robert Rabil's book (2016) on the Syrian refugee crisis has been very valuable to this research. One of the issues he introduced, is the use of negative coping mechanisms by refugees. The term coping mechanisms originates from the field of psychology, specifically the literature on stress (Mohamed Saleh Baqutayan, 2015: 481). The idea is that coping mechanisms are a way to respond when demands become too high and expand beyond the capabilities of an individual's resources. These mechanisms can be part of a larger coping process which takes place over a longer time-span, but can also be short-term. It can be a reaction to a single event or a combination of multiple episodes. In some cases, the initial reaction is (meant to be) short-term but the consequences prolong the process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980: 224). The demands can either be internal or external and their gravity is subject to how the individual perceives them.

Coping mechanisms are neutral in nature, they can deal with the demands in positive and negative ways. Even when the individual's intention is to solve the issue, the result might be negative. Coping mechanisms can be either active or passive, indicating whether people try to change something about their situation, or either accept or deny it. They can be expressed through behaviour, but also through thoughts and emotions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Mohamed Saleh Baqutayan, 2015: 481). The mechanisms can be either problem-focused, in an attempt to address the base of the problem or emotion-focused, dealing rather with the experienced symptoms, which can mean that people attempt to change their perception of the problem. Various coping mechanisms have been divided into four categories, but people often use a combination (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Different ways for dealing when demands are too high are either: attempting to change the situation, fleeing, attempting to reduce the stress by seeking support or accepting the situation (Mohamed Saleh Baqutayan, 2015: 482).

I will not delve further in to psychological theory, since this is not my field of expertise. But the concept is important in this case, because it affects both the refugees themselves and their highly insecure environments. The situation they are in forces them to resort to coping mechanisms, that in some cases result in negative consequences. Behaviour is something that can be observed from the outside, but this is not possible with thoughts and only partly with emotions. Rabil (2016) gives examples of various forms of coping mechanisms he has observed. He mentions mechanisms such as reducing daily meal intake, child marriage, child labour and withdrawing children from school, survival sex, taking loans, illicit activities and radicalization. He explains that these mechanisms are often a result of lacking resources, but he does not elaborate on the

decision-making process behind these mechanisms, which is something that will be explored in this thesis.

Refuge and Informality in Lebanon

Informality has traditionally been explored more in relation to the urban poor in general than to refugees specifically (Sanyal, 2015). In relation to the urban poor, individual perspectives on the concept have received more attention, but again more relating to their legal, political and/or economic status than experience and meaning (Sandada, 2014). More importantly, their status is fundamentally different, which has also added to existing tensions (Sanyal, 2015; Fawaz, 2017). Citizens have access to certain resources and rights to which refugees do not. Vice versa, refugees might be able to access certain services through humanitarian agencies.

While exploring literature on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it became clear how much pressure is put on the Lebanese society by this influx (Cherri et al., 2016; Rabil, 2016). Syrian refugees are not living in camps, but have instead moved into existing communities. These communities often consist of people that form the more disadvantaged groups in society. The two groups are competing for resources, which are already lacking. This competition has been emphasized by various researchers, but the link with informality is missing. This link is crucial, because it grounds the understanding of how connected the two groups are.

Various researchers explore informality in Lebanon (Cammatt & Issar, 2010; Alija, 2017; Fawaz, 2017), the effect of informality on Syrian refugees in Lebanon (Lebanon Support, 2016, Sanyal, 2017), the effect of the Syrian influx on the Lebanese society (Cherri et al., 2016; Rabil, 2016) and the relationship between Syrians and Lebanese (Rabil, 2016). But they all consider this separately and do not explore the connections between these various elements.

Informality is very much woven into Lebanon's society and political system. Alija (2017) explains that informality is part of all layers of the Lebanese society, and is weaved through formally regulated aspects. This is something that happens in many settings with formal and informal practices (Roberts, 1994). Salem & Kavar (2015) explain that informality causes high levels of instability and insecurity for Lebanese people in the labour market, especially for lower income groups. They note that informality for women is much higher than for men (2015, p. 25).

Two factors have emerged as most important in this context; sectarianism and the weakness of the government. Harati & Shamruk (2013) explore Lebanon's informal economy and argue that

informality is very present in Lebanon, that it negatively influences productivity of companies and therefore also the general economy. Some researchers that have focused on informality in Lebanon, include other aspects, such as welfare allocation (Mollica, 2014), health care (Bochi, 2014; Chen & Cammett, 2012) housing (Sanyal, 2017), and politics (Chen & Cammett, 2012).

Fawaz (2017) explains that it was thanks to informal networks, that Lebanon and Beirut specifically have been able to absorb so many refugees relatively smoothly and over a short time span. She argues that we need to recognize the value of informality and its capacity for creating flexible and adaptive environments. However, we also need to realize that these networks cannot bear the responsibility by themselves.

Exploring informality through this specific case will create more understanding of what informality means in practice, which is necessary in order to make better use of it, but also to recognize its limits (Sanyal, 2015). Several researchers have delved into this concept and have also specifically applied it to refugees in Lebanon. However most of them take an approach that addresses issues that are larger than the individual, such as urban planning (Roy, 2005; Tsenkova, 2012) and the housing market (Fawaz, 2017), political considerations (Kibreab, 2007; Round & Kuznetsova, 2016; Sanyal, 2017; Turner, 2015; Darling, 2017), citizenship (Sanyal, 2014) or aid provision (Sanyal, 2017).

Fawaz (2017) explores refugee life in Beirut and explains the appeal of coming to an urban area, despite the risks and poor conditions many people face. In an urban area, people can make use of existing networks, and they have more flexibility and opportunities than if they were to find shelter in an organized camp. However, this does mean they are in a position in which it is hard to achieve stability. One thing which the refugee perspective can provide, is more information on why they have decided to come to this specific place and what the reality of their situation is.

Pasquetti & Picker argue that more research needs to be done on the temporality and uncertainty that accompany the experience of informality (2017: 540). Both of these elements are embodied by the refugee status. They argue that in a way, informality also confines and marginalizes people (Pasquetti & Picker, 2017). Humanitarian refugee relief has seen a shift, moving away from encampment, which has been critiqued as being inhumane (Turner, 2015). Is this trend of refugees urbanizing rather than living in camps an improvement, or is it rather an alternative that comes with a new set of negative consequences?

Sanyal (2015: 123) has argued that in practice, informality is not much better, that it damages the legitimacy of refugees, increases insecurity and that people remain dependent on humanitarian agencies for certain services even though it is now harder to reach them. What will be important to discover, is what the realities of non-encampment and informality are. Which opportunities exist here and what are some of the difficulties people face? To what extent are people satisfied about their situation and did it give them what they hoped or expected?

The individual perspective can provide new insights on what refugees believe they need in order to improve their situation. Are they inclined to stay or would they rather return to Syria as soon as possible or move elsewhere? Finally, it can also help collect more information on tensions that exist between the different groups and in which ways we could possibly address these.

Research Questions

The focus of the thesis is the relationship between the concept informality and the lives of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. The main research question remains broad. I ultimately chose this specific phrasing because it is straightforward and covers the complete scope of the thesis. The sub-questions provide more specific guidance into various elements on which this thesis focuses.

Main Question:

How does informality affect the situation of Syrian refugee women living in Lebanon?

Sub-Questions:

1. Which aspects of the Lebanese context influence the nature of informality in this specific setting?
2. How does informality influence Syrians, living in Lebanon specifically?
3. How does informality influence the relationship between Syrian refugee women and the host community?
4. How does informality influence which coping mechanisms are used?
5. How does informality influence the position of Syrian refugee women specifically?
6. How does informality in Lebanon influence the status of the refugee?

Question 1 relates to why the Lebanese context is important to understand and how it creates a specific form of informality that is unique to this setting. Questions 2 and 3 discuss different

ways in which Syrian refugee women are affected by informality, how this influences their position in society and the host community and their relationship with the host community. Question 4 addresses more profound ways in which informality influences people's lives and how they choose to deal with their situation. Question 5 focuses on position of women specifically and why this is important to highlight. Question 6 challenges current understandings what it means to be a refugee and how Lebanon's informality provides reasons for reassessment.

3. Methodology

There are many types of research in social science. This thesis in particular is highly qualitative, which makes it difficult to match it to certain methodological requirements. The empirical part of this thesis is largely based on personal stories and perspectives, rather than raw data and hard facts. However, it remains very important to discuss methodology thoroughly, so that it can be established where difficulties lie and in which ways the thesis can in fact meet methodological requirements.

In the first section of this chapter, I will explain how the research is designed, including various aspects of sample selection, data collection, and data analysis. The second section will reflect on the intricacies of the research process, including aspects related to the position of the researcher, and ethical and safety considerations.

Research Design

This research is designed as a qualitative study and its foundations lie in grounded theory. Qualitative research is a form of research that looks for meaning, in-depth explanations of a certain phenomenon. It is highly descriptive, using words rather than numbers and inductive, meaning that it derives theoretical ideas from data, rather than testing fixed hypotheses (Merriam, 2016, p. 15).

The purpose of this research is to explore the details of a specific case: female Syrian refugees in Lebanon living in informality. It is not looking to analyse and/or compare large samples or collect proof for cause and effect (Merriam, 2016, p. 5). Instead, it is searching for in-depth explanations and nuances in the relationship between theoretical concepts and a small group of people in practice. Qualitative research can provide tools for this type of detailed analysis and for explaining how people understand their experiences (Merriam, 2016, p.6). This is exactly what this thesis aims to clarify through the interpretation of individual perspectives. It bases its understanding of key concepts on these perspectives, which are then interpreted by the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is the 'primary instrument for data collection and analysis' (Merriam, 2016, p. 16). This brings complications with it, and awareness of this is key.

Sample Selection

The participants are adult Syrian refugee women, who do not have Lebanese citizenship, have moved to Lebanon after the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 and are living in and

around urban areas of Beirut, Lebanon. The reason I am focusing on Syrians, is that they are part of one of the biggest current humanitarian crises worldwide. When I began considering my options for this master thesis, I knew that I wanted to focus on refugees in the Middle East region. I was particularly interested in this region, because it has such a complex mix of social, cultural and political challenges. The reason for the focus on Lebanon, is because this country currently has the highest percentage of refugees worldwide and its socio-political structure and history present specifically challenging circumstances.

I only included women who arrived after the beginning of the war, because from that moment on, the influx and pressure on Lebanon has been increasing rapidly. I only included women that do not have Lebanese citizenship, because that has allowed me to explore the concept informality. For this same reason, I intended to only include women of working age. However, the boundaries for this proved to be quite fuzzy, which is why the distinction has shifted to adults. I focused on people living in urban areas, since they face challenges unique to their environment, that might be very different to those of people living in rural areas.

It would be relevant to include both men and women as each faces their own challenges, but my data set is too small to be able to make any valuable comparison and focusing solely on women has allowed the collection of more specific data on one group. The reason for choosing women is related to relevance and my own position as a researcher.

I was able to access participants in various ways. My network initially started with the NGO where I conducted my internship. But as I was staying in Beirut for a longer time, I also encountered people in many other ways, through friends, roommates and sometimes randomly. The Syrian community in Lebanon lives in quite concentrated pockets and the networks are strong (Rabil, 2016). Therefore, my hope was that once I had spoken to a few women, I could use snowball strategy to find more participants. In some cases, women who had already participated connected me to fellow Syrians, but the snowball effect was not particularly strong. This seemed partly because people were more likely to participate if they had a direct connection to me. Also, many women were quite hesitant to participate. The advantage of this is that participants were not all connected to each other.

In total, I interviewed 21 women between the ages 21 and 73 from many different regions in Syria. They were all from different cultural and religious backgrounds, though a majority identified as either Shia or Sunni. Of the 21, 5 were currently living in informal camps and the

rest in standard housing, 16 of them living with family members. Of the 21, 10 were employed and 6 were enrolled in a Lebanese university.

As explained earlier, various participants did not consider themselves refugees. Grounded theory methodology dictates that the researcher should take participants' perspectives very seriously and this is also the aim of this thesis. In some cases, this means that theoretical concepts arise directly from comments by participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: p.61). I will continue categorizing my participants as refugees from a methodological standpoint, because I believe they all fit the official description. I will, however, address which implications this discrepancy has.

Data Collection & Analysis

Interviews

I have conducted semi-structured interviews. The reason for this is that there was a specific purpose for the data collection. However, individual perspectives formed the basis of the data collection, which is why it was crucial to give participants a certain degree of freedom. Besides, the aim was to collect new insights, rather than confirm existing assumptions or test hypotheses (Bryman, 2012). Depending on approval of the participants, I recorded and transcribed some of the interviews for the purpose of reliability and analysis. However, not all women felt comfortable with this, which is why during some interviews I was only able to take notes.

Some interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter, which can cause some difficulties. It was difficult to understand some of the nuances of people's stories and some things are lost in translation. However, interpreters can also help understand and explain certain nuances. This is of course always tricky, as they can add their own perspective to their explanations. An interpreter can also be helpful for connecting to people and helping to arrange certain practical aspects.

However, I strongly preferred the interviews that were one on one. I felt that it was much easier to connect and truly engage in conversation. I realized this halfway through the process, which is why from then on, I steered the sample selection slightly towards women whom I could converse in English with. It is likely that this caused the second half of participants to be slightly different than the first. In the interviews that I conducted from that point on, the women were generally more educated and younger. They were also more often engaged in education and/or employment at the time of the interview. All the women living in camps, were part of the first half, which was definitely caused by a snowball reaction.

Comparing the first and second half of the collected data, the biggest changes that can be detected is that the interviews are more elaborate, more detailed and more outspoken. I felt that it was easier to discuss personal and sensitive topics and that women were less afraid of possible consequences. Women who had been involved in higher education also seemed to have better understanding of what my purpose was, which also made the interviews somewhat easier. On the other hand could this mean that this might cause someone to adapt to the wishes of the researcher.

Levels of Coding

Concepts exist on different levels and can be separated into higher-level and lower-level concepts. Higher-level concepts are also known as themes or categories and point to broader trends in the data. Lower-level concepts, associated with dimensions and properties, are more detailed and address various elements of the higher-level concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2007: 130). This implies that the lower the level of the concept, the more closely connected it is to the data.

Coding can be divided into stages in various ways. However, this research has followed three levels of coding; open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The analysis starts with open coding, in which the researcher attempts to divide the data into more manageable chunks, based on similar content. In grounded theory, the researcher should always attempt, as much as possible, to begin the data collection with an open mind and to continue this throughout the first stages of the analysis. The idea is that the researcher starts without defined hypotheses and as few assumptions as possible. During open coding, the first categorizations are made, but might still be subject to change.

In this research, the first categorizations were based on a combination of the research questions and findings that came purely from the data, separate from preconceived notions (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Axial coding is when the researcher searches for connections between the categories, how categories are related and ways in which they confirm or contradict each other. The final stage is that of selective coding, in which the researcher identifies the categories that are most essential, or that form the core of the research. This is also the stage at which all categories are positioned within the bigger picture of the entire data collection. It is important to note that the three stages do not (necessarily) occur separately, nor in a linear fashion (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

The chart below gives an overview of the main coding categories that were identified from the data. In the codebook, which is included in appendix II, the reader can find an overview of all codes that were applied with the help of Atlas.ti. The reader will notice that the majority of the categories correspond with various sections of chapter 4. In some cases, categories were reorganized in the empirical chapter, for the purpose of structure. The first category, *comparing situation* applies to participants comparing their own situation to that of other people, therefore putting it in perspective and providing insight into how they viewed their own position in relation to others.

Chart 1: Main Coding Categories

Comparing Situation
Context
Coping Mechanisms
Education
Employment
Financial Situation
Future
Housing
Nationality (Lack of)
Opportunities
Relationship with Lebanese
Security
Stability
Women/Men

The reader can also find a list of interviews and a vocabulary list in the appendix. The full interview transcripts and audio files have been submitted to the university's database.

Validity & Reliability

Bryman (2012: 69) explains that scholars disagree on whether research that is highly qualitative, can ever meet the various requirements for validity and reliability. Yin (1994: 18) argues that there are in fact ways to build these aspects into a research design and that the researcher must do everything to aim for as much construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability as possible.

It is difficult to obtain external validity, or to make any sort of generalizations. This is very much applicable to this thesis, as its sample and scope is small and its data relative to the participants. A master thesis simply does not allow the researcher to spend too much time or resources.

Therefore, the focus is rather on adding to existing research with nuance and depth and finding aspects that deserve further research. Yin (1994: 34) explains that construct validity is also problematic with highly qualitative research. In this research, this is especially hard because the data is subjective and the theoretical concepts can also be interpreted in many different ways. A way in which this issue can be tackled best, is to be clear on how aspects in this research are measured and defined and why.

Internal validity faces similar problems in this case, because many of the results are based on individual perspectives and not on hard facts. Again, I have dealt with this problem by aiming for as much transparency as possible. Last, reliability is also difficult to achieve, and as such, highly qualitative data collection is very context-, researcher- and participant-dependent. However, I have aimed to strengthen my reliability as much as possible, by keeping audio records and transcripts whenever participants were comfortable with this.

Research Process

Reflection

This research process has been challenging, but very revealing and informative. In field research, the researcher is dependent on whatever circumstances he or she faces. Luckily, I did not face any problematic situations. The most important challenge was to remain flexible and adapt to my environment. In some cases, this meant that appointments for interviews were cancelled, they took place very late in the evening or on a location with disruptive background noise.

My aim was to adapt myself to the participant as much as possible, and that it was up to them to decide whatever was most comfortable for them. However, in some cases this meant an interview took place in someone's home and in this case family members were often present. This meant I had to explain that I wanted to speak to the participant exclusively, but this did not always go according to plan. However, meeting family members however, is a very nice way to connect to people and to socialize, which is very important in Lebanese culture. Even formal business meetings are often accompanied by a meal or a shisha. I did always make sure that I based my analysis solely on the answers by the participants and not their family members. But it is possible that they were not always able to speak freely or that their answers were influenced by presence of others.

The key was always to find a balance between establishing research integrity, conducting a successful interview with a participant and having an enjoyable encounter with another person in which they felt comfortable. The most important effect this has had on the data, is that it negatively influenced the consistency in the interviews. I was not able to discuss all topics with every participant, which means that I do not have 21 views on all issues. It also means that I have much more information on some topics than on others. However, by maintaining this balance I aimed for influencing the participant as little as possible and collecting data that is as genuine as possible.

Looking back on the process of field research, I believe it was a valuable addition to this master thesis. It allowed me to really delve into this case and make it my own by spending time in the setting. Even though three and a half months in Lebanon taught me a lot and gave me a better understanding of the setting, many things remain a mystery to me. The society is highly complex and an outsider needs much more time to truly understand the various social, cultural and political processes in this country.

Researcher Bias & Assumptions

As I read more and more about the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, I also learnt about some of the tensions between the Syrian and Lebanese populations. I began to notice myself picking sides, in favour of the Syrians. I understood their situation as extremely challenging and some of the harsher reactions coming from the Lebanese people as intolerant. I was therefore struck by the level of understanding expressed by the many women I spoke to, despite negative experiences they had with the Lebanese people. Even though they were struggling to coexist with the Lebanese people, the majority understood where this resentment was coming from.

Their understanding helped me to get a better grasp of the situation. Both groups are in a difficult situation and the host community is simply overwhelmed. The Lebanese population struggles with many problems of its own and it makes sense that they are apprehensive about a group of newcomers. This is all the more reason why these two groups to deserve more help with existing in this space together.

Starting out, my assumption was that it would be easier for me to interview women than men. I would say that this was definitely correct, especially when we were meeting one on one. The majority did not seem to consider me as threatening or intruding. Many women shared highly personal things with me. In some cases, it helped them to asked me some personal questions; I

assume because it gave them a better understanding of my position. Some specifically expressed that they had enjoyed the experience and that it was nice to have someone listen to their story. It seemed like in some cases, my position as an outsider was an advantage, as I was viewed as someone without involvement in the situation and therefore without judgement.

However, it was still not easy. Other women were very apprehensive and even though they had agreed to speak to me, they were not willing to share certain things. It was not always clear what the exact reasons for this were. In some cases, they expressed that they feared for their safety, in other cases they seemed uneasy sharing highly personal things with a stranger. On two occasions, an interview was cancelled last minute and the reason both times was that the women were afraid of the reaction of their husbands. What also happened very often, is that I had arranged a meeting and then people assumed I wanted to speak to the man of the household. Then I had to clarify that it was the women I needed to speak to. In some cases, this was met with confusion, amusement and sometimes frustration. On one occasion, I had a long conversation with the father of one of the women, because he really wanted to participate.

In general, these sorts of experiences required flexibility and it confirmed for me that a participant should always feel as comfortable as possible. The most important conclusion I can draw from it, is that it emphasizes the importance of these conversations. Especially in more traditional families, where the women are not always heard, research is one of the channels through which their perspectives can be included.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical concerns involve a number of different aspects, but most of it revolves around the principle of *do no harm*. The aim is to collect data that is useful for the research, while at the same time doing as little harm as possible to the environment and participants. In the data collection for this thesis, this was done by considering participants' privacy and the effect of the interviews on their personal wellbeing.

Each interview was completely different in terms of atmosphere, contents and how much the women were willing to share. Some were very open and shared many personal things. Others were more apprehensive and seemed to wonder why I needed to know so much about them. In some cases, discussing certain issues brought up many emotions and traumatic memories. I dealt with this by always making clear at the beginning what the purpose of the research was and that it was entirely up to them how much they wanted to share, that they were free to skip a question.

Luckily, this type of research allows flexibly and this meant I could adapt the precise contents of the interview to the participant. The quotes that are used throughout the text are excerpts from the interviews. For the purpose of protecting privacy and safety of the participants, all names are fictitious.

Personal & Safety Concerns

During the preparatory phase for the fieldwork, I was required to agree on a safety protocol with my supervisor. In hindsight, this was very useful. Luckily, there was no need for me to resort to any of the emergency measures discussed in the protocol. However, it stimulates the student to thoroughly consider the circumstances. Even though Lebanon has been relatively stable for a decade, there are still many tensions and conflict can potentially erupt rapidly. During my time in Lebanon, I have not experienced anything that made me feel unsafe. It was however very beneficial to be embedded in the local community due to my research and internship. This made it much easier to be well informed and aware of potential risks. Some of the interviews took place in areas I did not know well, which made it more difficult to assess the situation. In that case, I was always accompanied by someone I knew and trusted. Looking back, I would say that immersing myself in this setting was valuable for the research and the experience.

4. Syrian Women in Lebanon's Informality

In this chapter, I will discuss the most important results from the data collection, explain how they support my main finding: that informality and the particular Lebanese setting increases vulnerability for Syrian women in Lebanon. This creates a problematic situation, not only for these women but also for the host community.

First, I will discuss certain elements from the context and explain why these elements are important for understanding this case. Then I will discuss how informality affects Syrian women in their daily lives and what the consequences of this situation are for these women and the host community. Finally, I will discuss how informality affects the position of Syrian women in Lebanese society.

Context

In the theoretical framework, I discussed certain elements from the context that are important to understand the setting of this case. I will continue in this chapter, by discussing which elements were identified as most important by the participants. It became clear during the interviews that the context is more important than merely background information. Most participants believed that specific contextual elements had a very strong influence on their experiences in Lebanon. These elements influence their situation in Lebanon and how they were received by the host community.

The various contextual elements that were discussed related to Lebanon's past and present. Past issues relate to Lebanon's complex history with conflict and the course of its relationship with Syria. Current issues relate to Lebanon's society and political climate, particularly its sectarian divides and socio-economic issues. In addition, I will discuss how various parties have responded to the refugee influx, which is also strongly linked to the specifics of this context.

History & Relationship with Syria

Lebanon's history of conflict is something that came forward as a crucial factor that has shaped the society and its people. Various women expressed that they believed that the Lebanese people are traumatized, and that conflict has become part of who they are. That it has made them fearful of outside influences and of accepting large groups of new people, such as the Syrian refugees. This was described by Ayla, a 46-year-old woman from the Damascus area who lives with her

family. She is currently working in a chocolate factory in central Beirut until she is able to be reunited with her husband who left for Europe three years earlier. She explained:

There are two kinds of people. Some are very good, they are our friends, like family really. Others are just searching for problems. The Lebanese cannot forget the history, the war. They generalize ... they talk bad. They have problems, were left in a bad situation. They don't get out of this. They talk bad things. It's because of the pain they have from the war. It's the same now. They are bullying us. They get angry, fight with us.

Lebanon has a complex relationship with Syria. The borders were not always as they are now, as Lebanon was part of Syria and after its independence, occupied by Syria. The problem is not only that Lebanon suffered through a war, but also that Syria was the occupier for a long time and many Lebanese have family members that fell victim to the Syrian regime. To this day both Syrians and Lebanese who were arrested during that war have still not been released and their fate remains unknown. I discussed this with Yasmin, a 26-year-old art student from Damascus, living with her family. When talking about why Lebanon's relationship with Syria is so complicated, she explained:

Maybe because of the war. I think so, because of the war that they had. If you ask old people: 'Why do you care?' They say: 'Syrians they destroyed our lands, they raped our women, the army.' I don't know what they did. 'And they were like controlling the whole areas and they think it belongs to them.' I'm like: 'Ok but that happened long time ago, why we are still like talking about it?' They're like: 'Maybe the young generation weren't aware of it, but we are aware of it.' ... They hate Syrian, they just don't like them.

To this day, Lebanon is heavily influenced by Syrian politics and the Syrian conflict. The various factions that are fighting in the Syrian conflict have connections with groups in Lebanon and rising tensions have transcended the borders (Rabil, 2016). Besides politics, the two societies are connected through generations of migration and mixed families. They also depend on each other for economic aspects, such as labour and trade. This has created a situation where the two countries cannot be separated, but their relationship is complicated (Turner, 2015).

Society & Political Climate

When discussing with the women how they experienced their life in Lebanon, they often brought up the fabrics of Lebanon's society and of its political system. The fact that these two cannot be considered separate has already been established in the theoretical framework. This was confirmed during data collection. Lebanon's complex political system and strict sectarian divides influence the way its society functions. There exists a precarious political balance, which does not

deal well with shocks. A large influx of new people is potentially problematic and it causes a situation that is difficult to integrate into.

Various women explained that there exists a lot of animosity within Lebanon between the different sectarian groups. They emphasized that Lebanon is a country where hate and mistrust are not uncommon, and where everyone is taught to stick together and protect their own. According to participants, there seems to be a lack of national identity, as everyone identifies through their own religious groups. This was described by Mariam, a 33-year-old mother from the Raqqa area. Back in Syria she used to work in a bank, but she is currently unemployed and lives with her husband and child.

In some places, I will not feel safe. Because people here are separated for, I think they are fighting between themselves. So, some people like us, some people don't like us. If I go to a place there is people that don't like us, they will not do anything to me, but I will not feel accepted there.

The divide that exists between groups is widened by the fact that people do not feel represented and protected by a unified government. Instead, many things that are not organised by the government are instead regulated through clientelist structures. This is illustrated by Fatima's explanation of why Lebanese society is so complicated. Fatima is 21 years old, studying political science and came to Lebanon with her family from Damascus.

I don't think the government is strong enough, there's a weird thing here. Families each have their own people. ... So, if you say I'm Muslim Sunni from that region or I have a friend from that region, if something happened to me, I would call him and I would ask for help. ... If there is a problem within a sect it's easier to solve than two different sects. And a problem with two different sects within Islam is easier to solve than with two different sects like Christianity and Islam. There's a lot more, there are like forty something sects here. And with the sub-sects and I don't know, it's so complicated. And they believe in it. That's the problem here, like for marriage or anything here. Marriage is not legal between Christians and Muslims, it's not legal. You can't get married in Lebanon, if you go to Cyprus, they get married there, and they come back. And that's weird, to get married somewhere else because of a religion. And I don't know, between sects, they're so conservative about it. Only the families that are very open-minded here are okay with everything. But most families living in Lebanon, they're very strict about. And it's not like that in Syria, it's not. For us, sects are not a problem. I never knew about my friends, what they were, what they practiced. I never asked them, they never asked me.

There seemed to be quite a lot of understanding about why it is difficult for the Lebanese to accept a new group. Hayat (30) emphasized how difficult it was for her to find a job and that she faced a lot of discrimination in the process. She is a trained artist and graphic designer, but works in a bar, because she has not been able to find a job that matches her qualifications. She

explained, however, that she understood the fact that the Lebanese were not so willing to hire her:

Lebanon is small, they are right. They have their own problems and its difficult for them to find a job, they also want to go to Europe. I don't blame them, I understand.

Various women compared their own situation to that of the Lebanese. Many of them expressed that they felt Lebanese people do not have an easy life. Even though they do have a passport and civil rights, the government fails to provide many basic services. This results in issues like high numbers of unemployment, inequality and poverty. Ayla explained why this makes it more difficult for the Lebanese to absorb a new group.

Yes, the problem is that there is too much pressure on both Syrian and Lebanese people. They have the same problems as us, that is why they don't like us. There are no opportunities.

Aischa, a 27-year-old dancer from Latakia explained that she felt that despite her difficulties in Lebanon, she felt like many Lebanese were struggling just as much or sometimes more than her.

Here it's just a mess. Not just for me as Syrian, it's just mess also for Lebanese people. I like this mess, like for short period of time ... but not always. Sometimes I need a chance to real life. And I feel really pity and *haram* for Lebanese people, because it's very beautiful country, I love it. I really love it. And all Syrian, we love this country as a country. But maybe because of the war they had, so they became like this and in Syria also, I'm sure people are becoming like this. Yeah because of the war, because it's the worst thing ever *yani*, it's a war.

Even though these women fled their country, many still felt that the Syrian society was better organized and more functional than the Lebanese, at least prior to the civil war. Rola, a 30-year-old woman from Damascus, explained why she felt this way. In her work with an NGO, she has worked in the poorer areas. She also emphasized the difference between the two societies in terms of sectarian divides.

So, when I came Lebanon, Beirut, I was shocked because yeah, actually it's not only because I'm used to life in Syria. But Syria as basic facilities, as a place to live it was better than being in Lebanon. Even like comparing Damascus to Beirut, it's very different. ... At the beginning, I met like maybe the poorest people in Beirut, people from a very hard place. And it was, I don't know it was very bad. And you can't, I can see, at the beginning I saw it clearly. I saw the war, how it's still in the city. Yeah. And also, I was shocked by the sectarianism, how the sectarianism affected the city, the people. Yeah in Syria we have, in Syria. I'm not speaking about now, maybe before. You never asked the person about, what is his background, sectarian background if you met him. So, I was shocked, I felt like: I'm very exposed when somebody asked me: So, you are this or this? Pardon? Ok that was very, very weird for me. Nobody asked me this before.

The Response

In order to understand the situation of Syrian women in Lebanon, it is important to consider the response to the influx. This includes the response by the host community, by the government and humanitarian actors that are involved. This influences the position of Syrian women in the society and what they experience on a day-to-day basis. As explained earlier, the government has been praised for its willingness to allow Syrian refugees into the country. However, this is as far as their action has reached. They have not provided any help or protection and have left Syrians to fend for themselves. This has put much pressure and responsibility on humanitarian actors and the host community. Services have been provided by humanitarian agencies, and the host community is forced to share its limited resources with the large group of newcomers. This has created numerous problems and has contributed to a highly tense situation.

Part of the blame can be put on the Lebanese government, but they are also simply overwhelmed. It is not realistic to expect that a government that fails to provide for its own society will much better for a group of foreigners. If they would, this could also cause more discontent in the host community. However, recent reports have stated that the government is pressuring humanitarian agencies and making work more difficult, in hopes of discouraging them and forcing Syrians to return. This was described by Rola, recounting her experience as a humanitarian worker.

And now it's getting worse, because the government is trying to influence the UNHCR to tell people to go back to Syria. So now they make the situation harder for the refugees to work, force them to go back to Syria. We don't know if they will renew the contract for the UNHCR to support Syrians. And this year it was very bad for the refugees in winter, especially because we don't have aid, in winter they don't have the oil to put the fire. I know some of the poorest families. The situation this year was very bad for all the refugees. And we expect that the situation will get worse.

Humanitarian agencies have been the most important actor providing for Syrians in Lebanon, but funding is lacking and current operations are overwhelmed by the number of Syrians that need assistance. Various women explained that at a certain point, the UN registration offices for refugees were not accepting new people anymore. It is not clear what the exact reason for this is, but they believed it was due to the fact that they simply lack resources. Yasmin explained how this is forcing people into illegality.

You can't come to Lebanon to register as a refugee anymore. ... The people who are running away from Syria are coming here the illegal way, it's horrible. Once I was on the border, I'm just hearing gun shots and all of that. They told me: "Oh yeah it's because they are Syrians running away and trying to cross borders the illegal way, that's why they're shooting them." It's a woman with her family and the guy with them. They are trying to cross the borders and they're just shooting them, randomly.

The Reality of Informality

The theoretical framework laid out how the concept informality can have many different shapes and forms, depending on the research field and setting. What this section aims to clarify is the nature of informality in this specific setting. One of the most important aims during the data collection, was to discover how informality influences Syrian women in Lebanon on a daily basis. How does the theoretical concept informality influence people in practice? What are the most important ways in which informality affects these women, as seen from their perspective?

Financial Situation

The financial situation of participants turned out to be a crucial issue. It was mentioned by every single participant as an important and/or problematic factor and influencing everything else. Multiple participants expressed that life in Lebanon, is all about money. Of course, one could argue that this is the case in many, if not most societies, but various women emphasized that this was specifically true in Lebanon, more so than in Syria. Yasmin explained that you need sufficient funds in order to live a proper life in Lebanon, because you cannot count on the government.

The thing is, in Lebanon. You can't count on laws either, because they don't protect. Nothing protects you here, only your money. And you don't know who will pay who to get you in trouble.

Therefore, money is a means of survival, problem solving, a safety net, and it very strongly influences your position in society. Various women explained that they considered Lebanese society to have a very strong focus on money and status, in comparison to the Syrian society. They considered it part of Lebanese culture that it is very desirable to become rich and, if you reach this position, it is very common to flaunt your wealth. Yasmin experienced this too. Her family is quite well off, but this seems to matter much more in Lebanon than it ever did in Syria. She explained that she felt the need to make people aware her wealth in order to be treated better, even though she did not enjoy doing this.

And some of my Lebanese friends start telling the others, they think it's important to tell them: "Oh by the way, Yasmin is rich and they have money." I'm like: "Why do you tell others this story?" They think the others will treat me better if they know this information. Obviously, that's why they are treating me better as well. If someone has money they're good. If they don't have money and they are poor, they are worth less.

But she explained that not having a passport, still made certain things difficult or impossible, especially with employment and building a stable life. And she explained that even though they had entered the country with sufficient funds, they were going through their savings too fast.

Many women also explained that although wages for Syrians are not much higher in Lebanon than in Syria, the cost of living is much higher, making it harder for them to make ends meet. This is also very much related to informality and the situation surrounding employment, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Various women explained that the costs have forced many people to return to Syria. Even if people fear it is still dangerous, they simply cannot afford to live in Lebanon. Aischa was the only one that expressed that she was happy with her salary at the moment; that it is possible to earn a lot of money in Lebanon. But, as she was working as a freelance dancer, she said that she never knew how long it was going to last. Again, various women mentioned supporting a family as a complicating factor. The financial situation of these women was extra challenging, because they were not only supporting themselves, but also family members in Lebanon and/or in Syria. In some cases, they were receiving money from family members living elsewhere.

Nour is 21, came from Idlib and lives with her family. In addition to her double major education and business, she is also working with an NGO to support her education and her family. Besides the financial situation, her comments also illustrate what it is like to arrive in a country without a support network.

I never feel safe. Because whenever you lose your job, you end up on the street, yes. My house in Syria in Idlib, it's large and has a lot of rooms, a big kitchen, a big garden around it. Everyone knows you, everyone helps you, everyone supports you. So, if you lose your job, I have house, I have food in the fridge. But here, never. My contract will end in September. I help my family with paying the rent and I am afraid, who will support my family? I am earning 500 dollars, the rent is 400 dollars, so I give 400 dollars to my mom, to pay the rent of the apartment and the rest, I spend it on my transportation and my personal needs.

Education

Education was considered by a majority of the participants as one of the easier things to access in Lebanon. As long as a person has a valid residency permit, there are various options to attend school for both children and adults. The main problems that were mentioned were related to bureaucratic issues related to the student residency, graduation and costs. One university in Beirut, named AUST, was specifically mentioned multiple times as providing easy access to Syrian students. All the other ones were officially accessible for Syrians, but have discriminatory policies in practice. Discrimination was also experienced regularly from either teachers or fellow students. However, this was not the case for everyone. Various participants expressed that they had a good experience at university and were happy to have found a purpose in Lebanon.

Hala considers her life in Lebanon a big improvement compared to her situation in Aleppo, Syria, despite many difficulties she has experienced since her arrival. After divorcing an oppressive husband, she experiences more freedom in Lebanon, despite living with her father who limits her freedom. At 49, she is enrolled in university for the first time in her life and studying to become an interior designer. She feels that Lebanon has more freedom for women than Syria, which is why she is also happy to raise her daughter there. Despite all of this, her aim is to return eventually, because she does not believe she will be able to build a career after finishing her degree.

After my former life, I want to make a change. For my future, I want to do something for myself. ... I'm happy, really, I'm happy. I don't know what god will bring for me, but I feel satisfied. Before I couldn't believe that a miracle could happen, but now I believe. Because I have changed now, I believe that maybe I have a chance. Before I applied for university, I lived here for two years. I didn't know what to do, I didn't have anything to do. My father didn't allow me to go out, his mind is very difficult. So, now I believe anything could happen.

Generally, the level of acceptance by fellow students and/or teachers in university seemed to differ per individual, which was also described by Yasmin as experienced in her Art major.

Even at university, there are a lot of people that are fine with Syrians, but there are a lot of teachers, they are not fine with the Syrian students. I had a teacher, I think she hates me because I'm Syrian, she always very mean to me because of my accent.

The biggest problem experienced by many women, was the fact that after having obtained a degree, this still does not improve chances of finding employment, as this remains illegal. Opportunities within the academic field, such as applying for research positions, were also considered as (nearly) impossible to access. One can enter research positions as a student, but there is no legal construct available for offering Syrians paid research positions. This is also the moment when student residencies end and the switch to a standard residency is not guaranteed. This situation causes many Syrians to aim to migrate to another country after graduation, which Yana was also planning. Even though she told me she was feeling much happier after having moved from the camp to an apartment and enjoyed her work with a local NGO, she did not feel like there was any way she could develop herself further in Lebanon.

Now yes, I want to travel, because I want to complete my study, I want to do a PhD. So, I'm researching about PhD scholarships, so I can travel. But if I cannot find a scholarship I will stay, I don't want to go to Syria. Here, it's very hard. It's not for allowed for Syrian to do a PhD.

Housing

Syrian accommodation in Lebanon can roughly be divided into two types. People are either living in informally arranged camps, often built and maintained with assistance from humanitarian organisations, or they are renting apartments from Lebanese property owners. As explained in the previous section, some camps are on the outskirts of cities or in the countryside. But in some cases, the distinction between camp and city is less clear, which links to Martin's (2014) *campscapes*. The camp that Yana had lived in before moving in with her husband actually looks like a neighbourhood to an outsider. People call it a camp because it is unregulated and residents either squat in empty buildings or build their own houses in and around existing buildings, much like a slum. Leena is 25, lives in an informal camp on the outskirts of the city with her children and other family members. She is from the Raqqa area and is currently unemployed.

I have been in Syria for five years. We've been in this camp for one year. Each year we are forced to move, because the landlord doesn't allow us to stay, I don't know why. ... It feels very bad, we never know what will happen. It's exhausting, we are fine now. But I thank god that we are here and not in a worse situation. Some Syrians are in a much worse situation. ... We pay rent to the landlord.

Regulations on aspects like safety, pricing and renter rights are lacking for Lebanese and do not apply to Syrians. Still, most participants said it was relatively easy to find accommodation; the biggest problem was again the costs. However, when going into further detail, more problems surfaced. Illegal housing makes people vulnerable. Syrians are not protected as official tenants and are therefore dependent on the goodwill of their landlords. They often face discrimination and many participants expressed fear over the possibility of being evicted. Discrimination is often connected to religious backgrounds, which is described by Ayla in the following comment:

We just moved to a bigger house, so I'm happy with that. But we're always afraid. Because my mother is Lebanese, we are renting the house on her name. We are trying to keep it a secret, because they don't want Syrians in the building.

The Syrians who are living in the informal settlements are, generally speaking, the people with less financial means. All participants who I spoke to that were living or had lived in camps, said that they would (have) move(d) as soon as they could. Money was the biggest obstacle to overcome. Even in camps, people are paying fees to land owners and for services like water and electricity. The conditions in the camps are very basic and, even though some services and aid are provided by humanitarian organisations, Marwa explained that this was not sufficient. She is 62 years old, from the Idlib area and is living with her family in a camp.

I don't feel safe at all. There are a lot of problems and we have to deal with venomous spiders and snakes. ... We have to beg for money to pay for water and for rent. The NGO provides water but it's not enough.

These women expressed concerns over threats from in- and outside the camp. Some did not experience this and felt like the people formed a community and were doing their best to help each other. Yana expressed much relief about moving out of the camp, even though she felt concerned about the fact that her family was still there.

And you arrive in a very bad situation in the camp. It's not a good place to live. Everything you need to live, you can't find it in the camp. Everything, the electricity, there is a lot of pollution. The roads, the buildings, the houses are very close to each other, so there is no sun in your house. You cannot live for a long time in this situation, you cannot live. I don't know how the Palestinians lived for 40 years ago, really I can't understand. ... And the most important thing is the people, every day you see the children without shoes walking in the street and it's crowded. Yeah, it's better now. But I'm still going to the camp, because my family lives there.

(Un)Employment

When discussing the sample, it was mentioned that the aim was to only include women of working age. I did, however, already indicate that this distinction might not be as clear as in some other societies and this proved to be correct. For the Lebanese, social security provided by the government is lacking and for Syrians it is non-existent. There is no fixed pension age and unless people have sufficient funds or a strong support system, they will continue to work until they are physically no longer able to do so. Therefore, the sample now consists of adults. Child labour is also very common. However, as this is an entirely different group facing their own set of challenges, they are not included. Whether or not Syrian women are working in Lebanon, depends on factors such as their family structure, family wealth and whether or they are responsible for providing an income for themselves and/or their family members. Hayat described how much effort it took for her to find a job.

I have been looking all the time since I have arrived here. I have gone to over 200 job interviews, but they don't want to hire Syrians. So, when I couldn't find a job in my field I started looking for other possibilities like bars. But they also don't want to hire us. One guy said I could work behind his bar as long as I didn't speak, so no one would hear my accent. He wanted to go out with me even though he was married and has children. ... Some people think that because I'm Syrian I am a whore. Not all of them are racist of course, but a lot of them. ... Wherever I go, when they hear my accent they will say something.

Job Availability & Income

It is difficult to find employment in the first place, as many employers do not hire Syrians, either because it is illegal or because they simply don't want to. Besides, unemployment in Lebanon was already high before the start of the Syrian Civil War and continues to increase. There are not

enough jobs available for Syrians, but also not for the Lebanese themselves. Many employers therefore prefer to hire Lebanese people over Syrians, because they want to employ and help their own people first.

Syrians are mostly involved in illegal employment and generally earn less than Lebanese workers. Even when Syrians have a valid residency, they are not legally allowed to work. But of course, people need to make a living and provide for their families, as the government also does not provide any type of financial support. Syrians who are registered with the UNHCR have access to some financial support, but this is not sufficient.

Many participants explained that they felt they were actually treated well, but almost all of them said that they were paid less than Lebanese employees in similar positions. Even if they were able to stay in the same job for a longer period, there were usually no possibilities to grow, as Zahra explained. Zahra is 23 and nearing the end of her graphic design degree. Just as she was finishing high school in Damascus, war broke out in Syria. She has lived her entire adult life in Beirut and has become very attached to the city. Because of the life she has built, including a large social network, she is not inclined to leave. However, a lack of opportunities after university forces her to consider options abroad in the future.

The reason why I will stay here is not because of the work opportunities, it's just because of the social aspect, that's what I've built here. But I know there is not much, like work opportunities aren't that great here. Whatever your job is, you're just gonna stay in that position all of your life. If you're an employee and you get paid this salary and *challas*, it's always gonna be like this.

Illegal employment is easier to find in informal and low-skilled sectors. Most educated Syrians are therefore not working in the field they were trained for. They are not able to continue their professional development and are forced to find work below their level. This also causes more competition in these sectors and with lower-income and more disadvantaged groups. Yana, a 32-year-old woman from Homs, initially lived in an informal settlement or camp on the outskirts of Beirut. She got married recently, which allowed her to move out of the camp and in with her husband. Her family is still living in the camp, as they cannot afford to live anywhere else. She is highly educated but is not able to find work in her field, which is why she is working in the camp where her family lives.

I did my masters in analytical chemistry, but my job is totally different. I work in an NGO, because it's very difficult to find work as a chemist. It's not easy and it's not allowed to Syrian to work in these factories. So, I'm working in NGO.

And this is allowed for Syrians?

Yeah because it's a Syrian NGO, for Syrians.

Of the five women I spoke to who were currently living in informal camps, all but one were unemployed. In some cases, they were not actively looking for employment, for example because they had to look after their children. It also seemed to be more difficult to find employment as these specific camps were on the outskirts, rather than in the middle of the city. Simple things such as transportation can then become a large hurdle for people. Karima (73) from Raqqa was working in commercial agriculture, together with her husband. It is quite common for Syrians to work for landowners. This type of work is however irregular and provides little security.

Raaz is 31 and used to own a business in Latakia, before she came to Lebanon. She explained that the situation in Latakia was not as dangerous as it was in many other regions, but as the economy in Syria collapsed, her business also did. She was no longer able to provide for herself, which forced her to leave the country. She now works in a famous traditional restaurant in Beirut and lives with friends. When discussing her current job, she explained that she was happy with it. She felt that she was being treated much better than many other Syrians. However, she also said that there was no way, that her boss would ever pay her the same as he would pay a Lebanese employee. And if she would not accept this, they would find a replacement easily.

Yes, they are really friendly, it's a family business. And they are really nice with us. But also, it's a business you know, they think: 'No I will give her this price or this salary, it will be fine for her because she will not find more than that any place.'

Rights & Protection

Various forms of mistreatment and discrimination were reported by the women. The fact that Syrian people have no legal access to employment, forces them to resort to illegal employment. And forcing people to engage in employment that is not legal leaves them vulnerable to shocks and mistreatment, in similar ways to the housing situation. It means they are not protected as workers, cannot lay claim to any rights or report abuse.

Thus, if an employee gets ill or is injured during work, they are also not protected financially or medically. Rola shared a story of a friend who was working in construction, when he fell of a building. This friend is currently disabled, without a job or income and without medical care. If a

person in this situation does not have a support system, they are at high risk of ending up homeless. Safety regulations in high-risk working environments are also insufficient, as official monitoring is lacking. Various women also explained that they felt they could not make any demands or complaints, as their employer could easily find replacement and their main priority was keeping a job, not the working conditions. Therefore, employers know that most people will accept any situation, because they don't have a choice and depend on the income.

Consequences of Informality

When I began exploring the concept informality, my assumption was that its effect on people's lives is mostly negative. This assumption was challenged when considering whether camps provide a better alternative. During data collection, Zahra expressed comments that further challenged my assumptions although I still believe that the consequences remain mostly negative. The positive aspects mostly related to flexibility and freedom: Lebanon's informality can actually create opportunities, because the government does not interfere. However, Zahra did immediately note the downside: that there is no protection.

Here, you're more like on your own, *challas*. You know whatever you do, no one's gonna interfere, which is sometimes good and sometimes bad yeah. It's good, because you're just free to do whatever you want. But if you're in a bad situation, *challas* you're on your own. The country, it's considered, you know there's no government. It stayed, I don't know how many years without president. It's like mafias are running the country. So, it's always been like that, since the war, the civil war.

Various researchers have delved into the situation of Syrian women in Lebanon and have also explored the nature of informality. A majority of these researchers focuses on practical ways in which people are affected, discussing elements such as income or employment. This makes sense, as they are elements that can be researched and proven relatively easily and consist of data that can be used as a basis for generalizations and conclusions on a larger scale. However, it has become clear in this thesis, that informality does not only influences people's lives in practical ways, but also in more profound ways, affecting their mental state and sense of being.

This section will focus on various ways in which practical effects of informality ultimately influence people and ways in which they deal with their situation. The consequences of not being eligible for Lebanese nationality can be grouped into four categories: instability, insecurity, lack of opportunities and an uncertain future.

Insecurity

Insecurity can be further divided into safety and access to help. Some women expressed that they felt safe in Lebanon and others did not. The ones that did feel safe often said that at least it was safer than Syria. But there was more agreement on a lack of assistance in case of emergency. Much like the view on not having a passport, this seemed to be a given for people. Many did not even try to ask for help, as they assumed there would not be any or they preferred to rely on people they trusted. Hayat expressed this as:

If I need help, my friends will help me. I cannot go anywhere else. Maybe my boss. It's everyone for himself you know.

Lack of assistance varied from institutional insecurity to insecurity based on discrimination. The presence of help from security forces such as the police, seemed to depend on which person was working that day, and abuse by authorities is very common. Yasmin for example, shared a story about her brother who was set-up by the police:

And actually, we hired a lawyer, who was Lebanese and who made it worse. They told us what to do and we did and that was like the biggest mistake. There was a problem and Lebanese were involved, what they did was, they wrote names of Syrian people. It was my brother, he's little, he's young, he's 23. And they got him into the situation with 12 others, all Syrians and they got them in a big problem, that wasn't solved for 2 years. Even with our connections and the rest still like, they're still there in jail. The rest, they are either in jail or they had to leave Lebanon and now their names are on the no-entry list, they are wanted.

Quality health care is only available to those with medical insurance or sufficient funds. Many Syrians are forced to go to public hospitals, which are reportedly overburdened and inadequate. Some medical coverage is provided by humanitarian organisations, but this remains basic. Financial means were again a crucial factor.

Lack of Opportunities & Instability

Of the different consequences of informality, instability was the category that all 21 participants agreed upon most unanimously. They expressed that their life in Lebanon was unstable, that they could not make any substantial plans and that they felt everything could suddenly change in a minute. Most participants also agreed that instability is connected to a lack of opportunities, and many connected this to the difficulty in finding stable employment. Because Syrians are not legally allowed to work in Lebanon, they are often unemployed, or engaged in illegal employment. This then leads to unstable finances, which is made even more problematic by high costs. This leads to difficulty to build a stable life. Ayla's comment illustrates how aspects such as security, health and employment are all connected.

There is no security here. If I get sick, I cannot even go to the hospital. If I want to find another job, I'm not able to do this. I have no rights here. Because I don't have papers, there is no protection. I cannot go to the police. If something would happen to me, if someone would attack me, I would go to jail before that person that attacked me.

Uncertain Future

The lack of opportunities and instability appear to be the most important factors influencing the uncertainty of people's futures. Syrians are not allowed to sign any formal contracts or obtain permits and cannot legally own property, businesses, cars, insurance, etcetera. These can be replaced by illegal, informal alternatives, but this does not provide a basis for a stable future. Education proved to be much easier; various participants were enrolled in a Lebanese university. Their Lebanese education does, however, not improve their range of opportunities. Hala explained how her inability to find a job contributed to an uncertain future.

I'm not working and I take money from my father. Maybe if I would work, I would feel stable. But for me *yani*, the future is question mark. Here I feel afraid, now I have an ID for three years, but I don't know after three years. What if my father dies, what if they make the rules stricter, not allowed me to stay?

Coping Mechanisms

What became clear in the theoretical framework is that various researchers address coping mechanisms, but most of them focus on one specific type of mechanism. They are also mostly approach the mechanisms as negative. The data collection provided a more diverse perspective on coping mechanisms. My purpose is then, to determine the nature of coping mechanisms in this specific setting and what their relation to informality is. In this specific case, it is interesting to note that is coping mechanisms do not apply exclusively to Syrian refugees.

Coping mechanisms can be considered a response to the consequences of informality. Syrians cannot rely on the Lebanese government. As a result, they live lives that are highly insecure and are forced to resort to coping mechanisms in order to deal with their situation, which then often affects the host communities. This is especially true when this situation generates competition between the groups or for example when it includes mechanisms relating to criminal activities.

As mentioned, coping mechanisms were mostly approached as a negative phenomenon, following the description by Rabil (2016). However, although these mechanisms are a reaction to a negative situation, the mechanisms and their effects need not be. Usta et al. (2016) focus on the possibilities of using information on coping mechanisms to establish positive change. They

discuss how training women on using positive coping strategies can help them face violence. Although that research focussed exclusively on violence, it may be useful to apply this approach to other aspects. Participants mentioned various ways in which they made positive changes to their situation or found positive ways of dealing with their problems. In this case, informality forces people to be resilient, to rely on each other and to search for creative solutions. Various women mentioned that they felt the Syrian community had grown stronger and was now more united than ever before. Mona expressed that she felt a beautiful thing had happened to the community:

We gathered in Lebanon, the Syrians. This is the most positive thing in Beirut, in Lebanon. We mostly used to know people that were similar to ourselves, with the same religion, same traditions, same lifestyle, same everything. So, here in Lebanon I know people from Aleppo, from Homs, they have a different culture. They have different language, different meals. It's like open Syria here.

During the first few interviews, I was struggling to find ways to discuss coping mechanisms. I could not directly ask about them, as this creates problems with both suggestion and forcing people's personal stories. I tried different approaches, but after having conducted several interviews, it turned out the coping mechanisms appeared spontaneously throughout the conversations, sometimes as a result of a totally different question. They are not connected to one aspect specifically, but apply to peoples' lives as a whole. The women often not only connected coping mechanisms to one specific negative or stressful event, but also discussed them as a consequence of a combination of things. It can apply and be connected to various aspects of living in informality. It was easier to ask directly about positive coping mechanisms, as this is less sensitive. As discussed in the theoretical framework, there are four types of coping mechanisms (attempting to change the situation, fleeing, attempting to reduce the stress by seeking support or accepting the situation (Mohamed Saleh Baqutayan, 2015: 482)), but people often use a combination.

Changing Situation

Most of the coping mechanisms were the result of women attempting to change their situation. Their aim was, of course, to improve their situation, but both the means and results can be either positive or negative. In many cases, Syrians are not able to continue their previous education or employment and therefore divert to alternative paths.

The most constructive informal solutions to problems with employment are semi-legal constructs or other clever deals with employers to circumvent these barriers. By far the best way appears to

find employment with NGOs, as was explained by Mona. Specific NGOs that are working with or for Syrians do their best to solve this unemployment issue. They do this by hiring Syrians legally as volunteers and then paying them illegally. Mona is 29 years old, came from Damascus and is reporting on the political and economic situation in Syria as a journalist.

Yani, most of the Syrians here have the opportunity to work with NGOs, working with Syrians. So, I worked with NGOs. For example, one that had a project for oral history. So, they want Syrians to listen to Syrian histories. So, they called me. ... By the contract that is for a volunteer, we are not working officially, because that's illegal.

Another way is to work for Syrian or international employers. Many Syrian companies already had branches in Lebanon and some have moved operations across the border, since the start of the Syrian Civil War. Various participants mentioned that they often found temporary jobs with foreigners, for example as a translator, middle man or research assistant. Mona explained that she felt this type of work was easier to find in Lebanon than in Syria, because there are more foreigners. Another way is to start a business, and register it in the name of a Lebanese citizen. Besides friends and family members creating constructs like this, this is also something that is done in exchange for financial compensations. However, even with these solutions there are still many hurdles to overcome, which is something that Yasmin experienced.

Yeah, we tried to open a company here and two years of paperwork, in the end I didn't get the permission. They make it impossible, they keep asking for stuff until you give up, you reach a point where you can't do anything anymore and then you give up. But I don't know any Syrians that opened any business here, only restaurants. Yeah restaurants, but I think they have Lebanese partners that's how they do it. They invest their money and the partner does the paperwork. But it's not possible for Syrians to open a business here, but Lebanese in Syria, all of them now they're opening bars and they're opening restaurants in Syria without having any difficulty, because Syrians want someone to like make their country more liveable. But here they should have the same, because not all Lebanese can afford opening businesses here, but they don't like foreigners to. They would accept other nationalities, but not Syrians. They accept the Gulf people, also the Americans. And actually, we paid bribes, we did it the Lebanese style. And then, still nothing

People also look for all sorts of ways to obtain a residency, which includes enrolling in university without actually attending to obtain a student visa. Another mechanism that was mentioned often is marriage. It might seem controversial to label marriage as a coping mechanism, but many participants, including Aischa below, mentioned this as a way to make life easier, and as the only way, besides paying large amounts of money, to actually have a chance to obtain a Lebanese passport. There are people that construct financial schemes, which include fake marriage. This is made easier by the fact that Muslim men in Lebanon are legally allowed to marry four women.

It's possible yeah, I can marry maybe someone Lebanese, he will give me his nationality. Maybe because I don't think about marriage, so for me it's like no.

In one case, a participant expressed that her marriage had given her freedom. Since getting married, her husband was in charge of her life, instead of her family. And her family was much more strict and conservative than her husband. Another financial construct that was mentioned relates to the fact that obtaining residency requires having a Lebanese citizen as your sponsor, which is often arranged through payment. When people are not able to arrange sponsorship, many travel abroad while someone is arranging sponsorship for them and come back once it has been arranged. This is something Rola's family arranged for her brother.

And he has worked a lot, to get the permit. But we need to pay a very big amount of money and he needs to travel to Sudan maybe, then we will find him a sponsor. Because Sudan is one of the few countries where you can go without visa, as a Syrian. So, most people go to Sudan. It's normal now, if you came here illegally and you want to be sponsored you need to travel to Sudan and come back. Young guys are coming from Syria because they don't want to go to the army, so they came here as either students or working in Syria. In this case they can't get sponsoring, so they travel to Sudan, get sponsoring, then come back to Lebanon.

Other reasons why Syrians travel abroad, including to Syria, is to have access to (cheaper) medical care. Yasmin explained that Syrians are not allowed to be buried in Lebanon, which means that if someone passes away, the family needs to transport the body across the border and bury it in Syria. This causes huge problems, especially for Muslims, because Islam requires a body to be buried within 24 hours. There are many further complications, such as safety concerns once in Syria, difficulty crossing the border and the financial burden.

And you know that if you are Syrian you are not allowed to be buried in Lebanon? You are not allowed to be buried here or you're not gonna find any place that allows you to bury someone. Or you have to talk to someone really high in the country to make you an exception. We had a sister who passed away here. And because she had Syrian documentation, we were denied the burial. They called us, you have to take her out of the hospital to another country. And we tried, but it's a process, it takes time. We couldn't, so we talked to the mufti [Islamic legal scholar] in Lebanon, he made us an exception, to give us a small grave for the army or something like that. But this was after we talked to a lot of people in high places in Lebanon to get to him so he can make this exception. So, other people how can they do that? The army involved was in the accident. The thing is they didn't even investigate, she died in a car accident, she was crossing the street. She was hit by a car. They didn't even investigate who did that, because she's Syrian, because she has a Syrian passport. Actually, we had used our connections for the police to work. They did nothing because he's Lebanese and we are Syrian. And they said every day Syrians die this way, so they're used to it. But because of the connections they managed to find out who did that and register his name in the police stations if someone finds him to arrest them. But only because we have connections, but I think other Syrians that die every day no one cares who ran over them.

Yasmin and others explained that having connections with high-ranking officials can help your situation. This is often along the lines of *wasta*, or sectarian clientelism, which is also how many Lebanese arrange their affairs. Other financial mechanisms include begging, paying bribes, and

making corrupt investments. Nour explained how this can also pave the way to a Lebanese passport.

It's very difficult, for the people like us. But if you have money or if you have people that can influence of the decision, you can. I don't know if you heard about it, maybe two months ago, ten, maybe thirteen people got the nationality of Lebanon. Yes, just pay. They made big investments and pay for the government, for the president. And he gives them the passport, but for me, I'm not interested at all.

Flight

Travelling abroad did not only come up as a temporary solution, but also as a final one. The lack of opportunities forces people leave Lebanon, and either go back to Syria or move elsewhere. Yana explained that she had felt scared about going back to Syria, but that she would do it as soon as she could.

Yes, I want to, of course I want to go back to Syria. When I get my PhD, of course I will go back to Syria. [...] Especially the people that didn't leave Syria. They still in Syria until now, despite the war, even the killings, even everything, they are still there. They need help, of course I will go back to help them. Because about 90 percent of the Syrians are now traumatized. All of them are traumatized now and they need help. Yes, I'm just waiting now until I feel safe, I need to feel safe.

The majority of the women were actually aspiring this, but most of them did not see any opportunity to do so in the near future. Aischa explained that she was trying to consider her time in Lebanon as merely temporary, while waiting for better times.

I can't own a car, I can't own a house, I can't own anything in Lebanon, because I'm Syrian. If I would marry someone Lebanese I can own a lot of things, but I would never consider this. I don't know, because for me Lebanon is just a station in my life.

I have interpreted fleeing not only in the literal sense, but also in the form of hiding or avoidance. Many participants mentioned hiding their accent and/or their identity because they felt that this made their situation easier or safer. A few participants explained that in some cases, they did the opposite. They chose to let people hear their accents, to spark confrontation. Avoidance ranged from avoiding certain people after a negative experience, to avoiding walking on the street to prevent harassment, moving to another neighbourhood or city to live among a different crowd, or not going outside at all, out of fear or wanting to prevent problematic situations.

Reducing Stress

Reducing stress mostly manifested as seeking support from friends and family. This is extremely important, since most participants felt they could not go anywhere else for help. Family members

often rely on each other financially, with either supporting their families or vice versa. Support also often comes in the form of food, clothing and other necessities. For this reason, it is also very common for people to live with many family members for this reason. However, this is not just a coping mechanism, but also a cultural norm and common among the Lebanese people too. In this way family members often help each other settle in, which makes arriving in Lebanon easier. Outside of families, the Syrian networks are very strong in general. Many participants mentioned that when an individual is struggling, support from the community comes in many forms, as described by Heba below.

It's not a bad life, we are just living day by day. But we want a better life, we need more money. For the 7 years we've been here, I have not been able to buy new clothes for my children. Other people are helping us, they are giving us clothes.

Many also mentioned that they felt this was part of the Syrian culture and society and that this is not the case among the Lebanese. Yasmin explained that this difference exists not only in terms of the governments presence, but as a general trend in society. This is again also linked to sectarianism, as people take care of their own groups. She described that Syrian society is much more unified, causing people to be more helpful towards each other. However, this could also be partially explained by the fact that people have left behind their trusted networks.

I wonder how the hell are they living in Lebanon. It's very expensive and in Syria you can manage, you always manage yourself, because you always have relatives, friends you can count on, even your neighbors, you never sleep hungry because you'll always find something. People care about others. If you don't, if your neighbors and your family, no one could help you, at least you can go to the next market and ask them to have food in exchange for a loan. And they will give you. After a month, you can pay what you get from the supermarket for nothing if you don't have a the moment. Because he knows where you live. And they trust each other, but here they are foreigners and people hate them. ... A lot of Syrians went back because it's too expensive here.

One woman mentioned that physical exercise and meditation was her way of dealing with stressful times. Various women, including Karima below, explained that they relied on their faith for support.

What do you think will happen over the next few years?
God will decide for us.

Reem, a 58-year-old mother, living with her family in a camp described how relying on Allah's guidance helped her accept her situation and her feelings that she and her family are stuck in Lebanon.

I'm scared but Allah will help. We cannot go back, we will stay in Lebanon, even if we don't want to stay.

Acceptance

For most participants, acceptance did not come willingly, but was more a matter of not having any other option. Acceptance often appeared to be of temporary nature, until better options come along. In some cases, acceptance requires stretching yourself to the limit. Some women explained that they avoided taking a day off as much as possible, because they felt it was the only way to stay afloat. Raaz was very open about her struggles and feeling overwhelmed in her situation of having to provide for herself and her family back in Syria.

Sometimes you get tired, because you are running, running, running, running. Even if you will stop just for one day, you will feel like you are losing your money, you are losing time, you are losing a lot of things. I'm really tired, but you can't say that you know. Even my family, I can't let them see that. I'm helping my family, I pay the rent in Syria, for the house my family. I pay for rent here and I also give them money for food, for a lot of things. Here also the same, so I have two families. My own life and my family. Even if I stopped to do anything, sometimes I want to get like two days off, I think like oh my god, I lost money. So, this is our life. If I stop, I will have to run again, faster than before. Both ways, I will be tired.

This was especially true for women supporting their families. If their income is lower than usual, this affects not just themselves, but they forsake their responsibility for others. Others felt that the only way to keep going was to suppress feelings of stress or problems as much as possible, either because they did not want to burden others, or because addressing the problem would make it bigger. Another reason for not dealing with problems is financial difficulty. Raaz explained that she stopped going to the doctor, despite an illness, because the costs were too high. Putting future plans on hold, such as career or educational pursuits, is another way in which temporary acceptance manifested. Yana explained that she was postponing her plans to have children:

I feel if I want to have children, I want to bring up my children in their home, not here in Lebanon. I don't want to let my child feel that they are a refugee here in Lebanon. Because Syrian now, it's not a good word to say. You are Syrian, so you are not good, you are very bad person. So no, of course not. I will not do that.

Again, women often compared their lives to those of others, finding contempt and being grateful. They expressed relief about being alive, being healthy, being financially stable, being safe, being with loved ones or simply not being worse off. Where they did not identify as refugees themselves, some compared their own situation favourably to that of those that did perceive to be refugees. Others compared their lives with fellow Syrians or the Lebanese and explaining how they were better off or at least not worse off. Mona described how she felt that her situation was not as bad, especially compared to some of the people she had met through her work with an NGO

I still think that my obstacles were so little compared to the other Syrians here, *yani*. I think my life in Lebanon, even all of these obstacles and stress and all of this, what I mentioned it's simple. Simpler than the other Syrian, because they suffered more for sure. Because I watched them, I know them, I worked with them. Throughout all of this volunteering work. Yeah so, thank god anyway.

Position within the Lebanese Society

This chapter has explored various aspects of informality, and which elements came forward as affecting the lives of Syrian women the most. This last section will explore the position of Syrian women in Lebanese society and how their position has been influenced by informality. First, I will discuss how informality affects Syrian people as opposed to Lebanese people. Then, I will discuss how this affects the relationship between the two groups. Finally, I will discuss how informality influences the situation of Syrian women specifically.

Parallel Informal Realities

A 2016 report by a Lebanese civil society organization states that Lebanese policies have forced Syrians towards informality. The report argues that the government's policies have created a network of informality for Syrian refugees (Lebanon Support, 2016, p. 27). However, my research suggests that informality already existed and is just more extensive for Syrians than for Lebanese people. What is important to know then, is how informality affects each group individually. Where can the line between citizens and refugees be drawn in practice?

Some of the issues that the Syrians face do not have an exclusive causal relationship with not possessing Lebanese nationality, but are related to the general state of the Lebanese society and therefore also affect the Lebanese. As was established earlier, informality in Lebanon is extensive. The government lacks presence and society has organized itself in alternative ways, partly through informal channels. This creates freedom, but also vulnerability. Some manage to do very well socio-economically, but if something goes wrong, they are not protected.

Informality is more strongly present in some Lebanese people's lives than in others, depending on their financial situation, employment, etcetera. For the Syrians, informality is a given in many ways. The women explained that this relates most clearly to anything that needs to be arranged through formal channels, or requiring official contracts or permits. This includes things such as employment, and owning property, businesses, cars, etcetera. These affairs are still arranged, but in illegality, which leads to instability and insecurity. Much depends on whether Syrians encounter Lebanese people that are willing to help them. Yasmin explained that her family had overcome

many difficulties thanks to their wealth and connections. She believed this was the only way to lead a secure life in Lebanon.

It feels like a jungle here, we can't go to the police and say something happened to me and they would protect me. Especially if I go with the Syrian papers, no way that they would provide any protection.

Although the individual situation of each participant differed strongly, one issue came forward consistently: the level of stability in their lives. Many of them argued however, that instability affects Lebanese people almost as much as it affects Syrians. In terms of opportunities and future possibilities, most seemed to believe the Lebanese were better off. But in general, stability is very hard to achieve in Lebanon. This was also a reason for participants to express that there was no place for them in Lebanon. Nour explained why this makes it very hard to build a future:

You cannot save money to set up your own business, have your own brand, anything like that. No, in Lebanon, even the Lebanese people cannot build future here, you know. 70 percent of the Lebanese people, they're outside Lebanon, maybe Africa, Brazil, something American, to get their future. Here, even Lebanese cannot, because it's small country and has limited resources and a bad government. So, it's difficult yeah.

Many women also referred to *wasta*, patronage or clientelism that is woven through all of Lebanon's societal and political structures. However, this is hard to access for foreigners as it requires a local network. But participants explained that if they had contacts who were involved in this, it could help them. Fatima explained this when I asked her what would happen if she needed help from authorities:

I don't think even a Lebanese person, for them it's that easy. Not even talking from a Syrian perspective, but I don't think it's that easy. I don't think the government is strong enough, there's a weird thing here. Families have their own people. So, if you say like I'm Muslim Sunni from that region or have a friend from that region, if something happens to me, I called him and like ask for help.

As was explained earlier, education forms an exception, of which a majority of the women expressed that it was easy to access and the only boundary there is financial resources. However, there are still differences between Lebanese and Syrians, in terms of access and social acceptance. Mariam explains in the following comment that any Syrian could access education, if they are able to pay for it. If not, it will be difficult as scholarships are rare and often preference Lebanese.

No, it's easy. I can go to university. Maybe not all the universities but when you have money to pay, it's ok. Here everything you can pay for everything. It's ok, if you can pay.

Access to education is also dependent on the policies of the school boards and only one university was mentioned as generally allowing Syrian students to apply. Primary schools separate Lebanese and Syrian students, teaching them in the morning and afternoon respectively. Fara explained how she could not always let her children go to school. Sometimes there was no one to pick them up and she was afraid to let them return home alone after sunset, at other times they simply did not have the funds.

My husband works so hard for the basics, we can just pay for the basics like food and water and rent and nothing else. But my kids are not going to school, that is also a basic, education. ... School for Syrian refugees is in the afternoon, not in the morning. So, they won't be able to go there in the dark. Also, we cannot pay for it, we don't have enough money. This is blocking all possibilities, we don't have enough money.

Position within the Host Community

The fact that the country's societal and political systems are so highly informal, influences the way Syrians have been received and treated by the host community. I argue that a government that is not willing or able to provide for its own citizens is even less likely to do so for an additional group of people, which puts pressure on the host community. Further, and relevant to this specific case, a population that is already lacking resources, is less likely to willingly share limited resources with newcomers. Syrians and Lebanese are forced to coexist in this informal space, but their positions are not equal. Then how does this influence the relationship between these two groups?

Competition

The fact that Lebanese society is so complex and that the government is failing to provide basic services has created a situation in which it is difficult to adopt large groups of foreigners. Many Lebanese struggle to make a living and build a stable life, which, according to the women I spoke to, does not make them inclined to welcome others. Lebanon is a small country with a small population. The number of Syrian refugees is now estimated to be almost the size of half the Lebanese population. A large Palestinian community also permanently resides in Lebanon, making the percentage of refugees one of the highest in the world. A majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in poorer areas and people simply have to share limited space and resources. The increase in population puts pressure on aspects like employment, wages, electricity and housing.

Some women explained that they believed this situation is exaggerated by the Lebanese and that the Syrian presence has actually stimulated the economy. Others were more understanding and believed that similar problems would emerge in any society. Rola expressed that she understood many of the grievances, but that she did not consider it an excuse for the way in which certain people behave towards Syrians.

To be honest, refugees when they came to this country, this country was still recovering from the war. Syrians work for very low wages, so they took the jobs from, from the Lebanese or Palestinians sometimes. They put a very big pressure on the facilities. This country, there is a very big number of refugees here. So, it's also not easy for this country. So yeah, sometimes you understand why people saying this, but what I can't understand is the hate.

Another form of competition has emerged, specific to this setting. Humanitarian organisations have entered the country, to fill the gap left by the government. Though quite minimal, they provide crucial assistance to Syrian refugees. This has increased animosity, as many Lebanese feel Syrians have access to certain things, to which they do not. In some cases, this means that Lebanese from the poorest communities are struggling more than their Syrian neighbours, which causes great discontent.

Relationships

Opinions on the relationship between Syrian and Lebanese people were very diverse and complicated. Some were more nuanced than others and many expressed that their comments were generalizing and did not apply to all Lebanese. Some women explained that they personally did not have bad experiences or that, if they did, they still had Lebanese friends with whom contact was positive. But in general, most participants viewed the attitude towards Syrians as negative. Multiple reasons were given, some rooted in the past and others in the present.

Many women expressed that they felt the Lebanese have a predisposed hate towards Syrians. The earlier mentioned history of occupation by the Syrian regime has created a negative attitude towards Syria, which is then often projected onto the Syrian people. The Syrian regime occupied Lebanon for decades and many Lebanese either have bad memories from that time or have heard stories from their family members or friends. Some felt that amongst the younger generation, who have not (consciously) experienced Syrian occupation, was less extreme in their hate, whereas Ayla, among others, believed that they had adopted their hate towards Syrians from their parents.

When Syria occupied Lebanon. People have bad experiences from that. Even the young ones, they were brainwashed, they heard all the stories from their parents. And you know the economy in Lebanon is bad, so people are struggling. They say Syrians are taking opportunities from them.

Another aspect that is also related to the past is the fact that Syrians have entered Lebanon for seasonal, low-skilled work for many generations. Some participants explained that this created an image that all Syrians are uneducated and have come to Lebanon for the sole purpose of finding employment. This is often paired with a lack of information on what is happening in Syria. Some Lebanese believe that it was not really necessary for Syrians to cross the border; that they could have stayed despite the war.

Prejudice also exists based on images seen in the news, shaping an image of all Syrians as either brutal fighters or damaged refugees. A view that was shared by many women was that a sense of arrogance is not uncommon among the Lebanese and that this is strengthened through sectarianism. That it does not really matter where you are from, that the Lebanese feel superior to anyone who is not their own. This specifically applied to other Arab countries and not as much to people from western countries for example. Yasmin explained that many Lebanese do not consider themselves Arab, but identify as Phoenician or European instead. In that case, being of Arabic descent was associated with being less intellectual and/or developed.

It's stupid. And then they say oh we are open-minded and but when it comes to religion, the least open-minded people in the world are the Lebanese. But they think they are open-minded, they're not at all. And they are French-educated, that's considered a privilege. They say: 'We're not Arab, we're Phoenician.' I'm like: 'Ok, well you're Lebanese, say whatever you want. You are in the Middle East and you are right in the middle and there's all the Arabic borders all around you, but believe whatever you want. How is it possible you're not Arabic?' 'We're not Arab, because Arab is like lower level than the Lebanese, definitely.'

This transcends into the present, with many Lebanese not being happy about the Syrian presence in general. Many participants actually expressed that they understood this discontent. Fara explained that she felt the tension did not really have anything to do with her nationality, but more with the pressure that has been put on the society, which is expressed in the comment below. Fara (43) fled Idlib with her family and is currently living in a one-bedroom apartment with her husband and five children under the age of 12. She cannot work because she has to take care of the children and her husband works whenever employment is available, which is very irregular. Her children are currently not going to school because two of them have medical problems and the family cannot afford the school or medical care.

80% of Lebanese people don't like Syrians. But it's not really about Syrians, but it's about these same problems. I have my kids here, they don't go to school, they are home all day. I do my best to keep them happy and not have them crying but it's impossible. And then the neighbour is angry. It's not about Syrian people, but it's about the way of living. In Syria, we didn't have problems like this, because we were living in a big house and not in a small apartment like this. It's difficult to live with strangers.

Other aspects that influence relationships are related to political and religious reasons. As explained in the theoretical framework, sectarian divides in Lebanon are very much connected to the Syrian Civil War. Political tensions have heightened and extremist groups have grown, especially close to the border. The influx of Syrians has increased fears among the different groups over these tensions. Some participants explained that Lebanese generalize their view on the Syrian Civil War and fear that all Syrians are affiliated with political and/or extremist groups. And again, the political balance in Lebanon is vulnerable and external shocks like these are very hard to absorb.

Some women felt like the relationship has gotten better over time, as the Lebanese have adapted to the Syrian presence. Others said the opposite, that discontent is increasing as the number of Syrians has continued to grow. Another factor is that some Lebanese find that it is time for Syrians to return, as these people believe the Syrian Civil War is reaching its final stages. Though some Syrians are starting to go back, the situation still remains very unsafe. And even in areas that are becoming more stable, there is a lack of opportunities due to the collapsed economy.

In terms of personal relationships with Lebanese, these varied strongly. Some participants did not really have any, either because this just had not happened or because they actively avoided them. Some women explained that it was simply easier to establish friendships with fellow Syrians, because of a shared history and cultural background. Others expressed that their lack of connections to Lebanese was deliberate, either based on negative experiences or fear of those.

Some women had established friendships and their view on these also varied. A few were explicitly positive, some explained that even though their friends did not really like Syrians in general, through their contact they had started accepting them specifically. Others explained that they did have Lebanese friends, but felt like these friendships were not as valuable as their friendships with Syrians. Yasmin felt that it was hard to establish a deeper connection, because many topics of conversations are sensitive and can create arguments.

We're used to them now. Before we never had any Lebanese friends. Now I do, but not real friends. And you can't get into a political or social discussion with them, you can't get involved. You'll end up fighting. So, I just go with them just to have good time and that's it.

Tensions

Tension between Syrians and Lebanese, comes in many shapes and forms. Prejudice was addressed earlier and the image of Syrians various from dangerous, uneducated, savage, poor to damaged. Some participants said that prejudice against women specifically came in sexist form. This is described in a story by Mona about using shared taxis.

Each time I go into a taxi, they are talking about Syrians. So, this time, the woman was saying: 'Syrian girls are bad and Syrian girls they are sex workers.' And I went crazy: 'What are you saying? I am a Syrian woman.' Then, when she heard that I'm Syrian woman, she started to offend me. Then I left the taxi.

The increasing pressure that has allegedly been put on the society by the Syrians, has some Lebanese to blame Syrians for all kinds of (unrelated) problems, including economic issues. Hayat explained that Lebanese are putting the blame on Syrians for a current garbage crisis.

There is no stability. When I go to a job interview they will hear that I'm Syrian and they won't hire me. They even think that the garbage crisis is the fault of the Syrians. When they haven't heard me speak yet they will talk about Syrians to me.

Examples of tension come in the form of discrimination, verbal and physical harassment. Many participants recounted moments when Lebanese people had verbally harassed them as soon as they heard their Syrian accent. Yasmin recounted an experience, where her family's car with Syrian license plates was pushed off the road while driving.

Once we were all in the car and they tried to push us off the road and people started to yell on the street because it was a high road and if he really managed to make me lose control of my car, we could have died. But people on the road started to yell at him.

Many women recounted tensions specifically related to their religion. And they explained that this was often related to existing sectarian tensions within the Lebanese society. They had experiences problems based on religions, which they had never before experienced in Syria. Access to a certain job, school, apartment or even a shop or hospital, is often denied based on religion. Heba (39) is from a village close to Homs. She is living with her husband and children. She explained that some of the religious tensions were a reason for her to consider moving.

I would like to move to a place with more Muslims, in Lebanon or in another country. We are having a lot of problems here. One of the owners of the building is Christian and he doesn't like Muslims. I would like to have a better life. But we are just accepting the situation because of the children. The owner is just waiting for us to make mistakes. He is fighting with us all the time. A few days ago, we just wanted to pack everything and leave.

Syrian Women in Lebanon

The position of Syrian women in the Lebanese society proved to be one of the most difficult ones to analyse, as perspectives were diverse and conflicting. When asking the women whether they believed the position of Syrian women in the Lebanese society is different than that of Syrian men, it was about fifty-fifty, yes or no. Some women believed that their Syrian nationality affected them more than their gender. In some cases, these women then immediately nuanced their answer, by saying that yes, there is a difference between women and men, but this is the case in all societies. Most women that did believe there was a difference between the positions of women and men were very convinced of this. They did however not agree on what the nature and the causes of these differences are.

I will use this section to emphasize which elements of the female position came forward most dominantly. First, are the traditional roles for women and men, based on Arabic and/or Islamic cultural and religious values, which influence the position of women both in Lebanon and in Syria. Then, specifics of the individual situations of these women mattered, such as family structure and living situation. Finally, security and opportunities were mentioned as most clearly distinguishing the position of Syrian women.

Traditional Roles

Arabic and Islamic cultural and religious traditions were mentioned as prescribing different roles for women and men. Various participants explained that they felt women were always treated differently than men. Fatima explained this was luckily not the case in her own family, but that girls are often disadvantaged, especially in more traditional families.

Women are vulnerable, way more than men, so yeah, they can take advantage of a woman. There is always discrimination between women and men. Like if I got a boy, here or in Syria, it's the same. If you get a boy, the family would be happy that you got the boy, finally. The one who's going to take the father's name. If you get a girl, they're disappointed. What's wrong with a girl? I feel like yeah men here are treated way better than women, especially a woman who is poor or weak or old they can take advantage of them.

Various women emphasized that this difference is stronger in Syria than in Lebanon, as the Syrian society is generally more traditional. Hala felt that the level of freedom she experienced had increased since moving to Lebanon.

No, freedom in Syria is very difficult for women. Because society in my country is very convinced of traditions. It's very difficult, they make traditions like rules in their life. Like they connect with religion in a way that's very bad. ... *Yani* in Syria, it's not allowed for you to have a relationship, it's not allowed for women to live alone. ... Here in Lebanon no, woman have freedom, she can live by herself. Can leave her family, rent a house, can have a relationship.

Rola explains in the comment below that especially women from traditional families are having trouble in Lebanon. What is happening then, is that informality does not allow them to break out of traditional gendered roles. It is difficult to build an independent and secure life in informality, which causes women to be more dependent on their families. Informality also prevents them from accessing any protection or assistance, in case they are subject to abuse.

Rola also explained why she believes that women are more vulnerable on their own. She had seen this in her NGO work, where she had met many women fending for themselves.

The widows, this is the worst part of the refugee situation. The widows, the divorced women. Many of them are widows or their husbands were even in jail, either in jail, kidnapped or killed. So, they have families, they have children and they can't do anything. ... Because many of these women don't have work. They have big families and even if they try to work they are in very bad situations. In work, sometimes they get harassed they, don't get paid a lot. They work for only 3 to 4 dollars per day in the fields. And then, when they go back to their families, so they can pay the electricity and they can pay the basics of their life. So yeah it's very hard. And many of these women, they were not working in Syria, they either don't have the skills. They don't have the right skills how to be alive, how to work, how to find your own job, how to be strong. They were less prepared and they don't have many chances here.

Individual Situation

One of the reasons why this topic turned out so difficult to analyse, is because the specifics of individual situations strongly influenced the answers. Whether the women believed their position was different depended on aspects like their family structure, their education, employment. Besides practical aspects, it seemed to also depend very much on their individual personalities. Some viewed Lebanon and its informality as providing freedom and flexibility and others focused more on the insecurity and risks.

Some of the women had moved to Lebanon with their families. Therefore, aspects like their level of freedom, very much depended on their family structure. The ones whose families were very controlling, expressed that not much had changed for them since moving to Lebanon. In some

cases, family members had become even more protective after moving to Lebanon, as they were no longer living in their familiar environments. This was true for Hala, before she enrolled in university:

Before I put my paper in that university, I lived here for two years. I didn't know what I do. I was only at home, I didn't have anything to do. And my father didn't allow me to go out. His mind is very difficult.

Women with more independence within or distance from their families seemed to believe their lives had been affected more by the move across the border. A few women who came to Lebanon, while families stayed behind, felt like they had more freedom in Lebanon than in Syria, because they were now in charge of their own choices. However, some believed that especially women alone were struggling more than those that arrived with their families.

Various women explained that between men and women, the men are more likely than women to live alone and women carry more direct responsibilities for children and family members. Various participants argued that there are more Syrian women than men in Lebanon. That the men have gone ahead to try their chances in other countries, whereas the women have stayed behind. When considering the data by Amnesty International, this is true, but the difference is not staggering with 26 versus 21 percent (Amnesty International, 2016a, p. 5). The majority is actually made up of children, with 53 percent. It's hard to say whether this is the difference they were indicating or whether they perceived it as larger and why.

In terms of aspects such as employment and education, the more activities the women seemed to be involved in, the more freedom they experienced. But in general, they seemed to agree that it was easier for men to build an independent life in Lebanon.

Security and Opportunities

When discussing the nature of the difference between female and male positions, if there exists one, answers also varied strongly. Though the women discussed various aspects, they can be grouped into two themes, security and opportunities.

On the one hand women were believed to be less safe in the society in general, more vulnerable to become victims of violence and abuse. However, many emphasized that this was not specific to Lebanon. Mourtada et al., (2017, p: 61) explain how percentages of early marriage have increased among Syrian women in Lebanon, due to aspects like economic vulnerability, disrupted

education and insecurity. Such practices already existed within the Syrian community, but increased due to specific circumstances in Lebanon (Samari, 2017). Both security and opportunities for women are also related to religion. Various people explained to me that wearing a hijab in Lebanon is problematic, as religion in general is a very sensitive issue. Wearing a hijab was viewed as negatively influencing acceptance within society, security and opportunities. Hayat explained that even though she likes life in Beirut, she is very careful and sometimes afraid.

Especially for a woman, some places are not safe. And because I'm Syrian. Every time I get in a *service* [shared taxi] I'm scared. ... Sometimes I speak English, so they won't hear my accent. I don't know what will happen if they hear it. Because we are Syrian, they think we are easy. Of course, it's more difficult for women, that is how society is. Us and the gays, we are the same category.

On the other hand, various participants expressed that they felt men were actually safe when it comes to the authorities: men are more likely to be harassed by officials and experience more negative consequences of not having a passport or a valid residency. Various women mentioned the fact that Syria has a very strict military service. Therefore, men who want to avoid being drafted or go to jail for refusal cannot return to Syria. Mona explained that this forced many men to leave the country very suddenly, at the beginning of the war. She explained that this made it difficult for them to arrange their papers properly. As a result, men are residing in Lebanon illegally more often than women.

Various women agreed that they have less opportunities than men in Lebanon. In general, men and women are engaged in different professions. Men appear to have more options, in terms of illegal employment, though not everyone agreed on this. Fatima explained why she believed this was the case. Illegal jobs that are available for men are often not accessible for women, as they are simply not hired. This makes it harder for women to increase their financial means and build an independent life.

Opportunities for men are always a bigger, bigger than the opportunities for women. Like if you see all the beggars, most of them are women and children. And I think because the men here, especially Syrian men are in labor force like construction yeah. So, women couldn't do that. Women here are not treated as well as men of course.

In general, the men are more involved sectors such as construction and plumbing and women are more likely to be hired as an assistant or secretary. Opportunities for employment also very much depends on family structure, whether families encourage women to work. In general, men are more likely to go ahead and explore opportunities abroad, for example, through travelling to Europe illegally. This is often also with the purpose of eventually bringing more family members.

This could be an explanation for the fact that there are slightly more Syrian women than men in Lebanon.

A big issue that was brought up by many participants, is the fact that Lebanese citizenship can only be transferred through men. This implies that grave institutional inequality between men and women is already existing in Lebanon. Various participants had Lebanese mothers, but were still not able to get a passport, which was the case for Mariam.

We can't have nationality even though my mother is Lebanese. She can only give us the residency here, but not forever. And not the ID.

Then, how does informality affect Syrian women specifically? Informality makes all Syrians vulnerable as they are not protected and cannot count on any support by the government. However, the fact that women are facing increased vulnerability, due to discriminatory practices and traditional gender roles is something that emerged from existing research, but also came out of my data collection. My research suggests, however, that it is not only Lebanon's system, but its informality, that creates specific forms of vulnerability for women in particular. Informality does not allow them to seek protection and as explained earlier, it does not allow them to break out of inequality based on gender.

5. Theoretical & Practical Implications

The Lebanese setting in which an increasing number of Syrian refugee women have been living since the start of the Syrian Civil War, presents a unique set of challenges for these women. This case is context-specific and the methods for data collection are highly qualitative. Many findings from the research therefore only apply to this specific case. Then, what does this thesis contribute, besides deepening the understanding of the situation of Syrian women in Lebanon? What it does, is urging us to reconsider the meaning of existing concepts and ideas, most importantly informality and the refugee. The Lebanese setting challenges our current understanding of these concepts and questions whether these understandings are sufficient. I will first address theoretical implications of the research, move on to practical implications and will then end with concluding remarks.

Lebanon's Informality

In Lebanon, informality is not an exception. Instead it is normalized, all-encompassing and involves all layers of social, economic and political life and it has shaped Lebanon's people. Therefore, it also determines how people live their lives. Lebanese informality is a system where people live their lives partly outside of regulated channels, instead relying on alternative networks. They are forced to be more reliant on themselves and each other, rather than on services by a government. This is important because it implies that this Lebanon's informality is much broader than how it has been typically approached. My data collection suggests three ways in which informality's nature is different in Lebanon, (1) that it is more than an economic construct, (2) that it is all-encompassing and includes everyone within the society and (3) that it influences people in more profound ways than just their practical day-to-day issues.

More than Economics

First, the theoretical framework established that informality was traditionally approached as an economic construct. It defines economic systems that exist outside that which is regulated. However, in Lebanon, this understanding of the concept is far too limited. Yes, wages and employment are crucial and emerged out of the data collection as central issues. However, it also applies to an individual's rights, protection and possibilities in general. Mona explained that the fact that she is a Syrian in Lebanon makes her feel like she is not protected whatsoever.

Yes, forget about it, because *yani*. If you are Syrian, no one will help you. will not be with you, it's your problem. There's not a specific department in the government that takes care of Syrian problems. No, absolutely not.

In this thesis, a link was made between informality and coping mechanisms. Both concepts were approached more flexibly and broadly. The connection that was made between the two concepts also revealed interesting information about each of them. As opposed to Rabil's understanding (2016), these coping mechanisms are not exclusively negative and cannot be placed within one category. They appear on different levels and in relation to different aspects of people's lives. The fact that Syrian women are having to deal with such extensive informality, forces them to resort to coping mechanisms. Informality however, also allows for certain degrees of freedom, which makes these coping mechanisms much more diverse and creative and in some cases, positive.

All-encompassing Informality

The second difference relates to which people informality applies to. Research that approaches informality as a purely economic concept, often assumes that it applies mostly to disadvantaged groups in society, in some cases specifically refugees. In Lebanon, this is not the case. Some researchers (Roy, 2015) argue that informality's grip is stronger on those who are more disadvantaged and that it influences them in more negative ways. This is something that also emerged from my data, but ultimately, it applies to everyone in society. Fatima explained that her father has influential friends who were arranging many things through informal channels in the Lebanese government.

I've heard a lot of my dad's friends got the Lebanese passport. Honestly, if you're a rich person and you can pay, you can buy a passport. And they opened, one of the years between now and before, they opened a year that they gave, they gave passports to others, and most of them are from rich families too. Because you know, if they invest anything in the country, that's good for them.

This is crucial because it gives a better understanding of how various groups in society are coexisting. They are not existing in an entirely different sphere, but are instead competing for the same space and resources. My research suggests that Lebanon's informality negatively influences the relationship between Syrian and Lebanese people. It squeezes the two groups into a space where they are forced to compete, which complicates relations and further disadvantages both groups. Fara explained that she felt that there are simply too many people in Lebanon that need help and that this is causing problems with the Lebanese.

It's difficult when you don't know anyone. No one can help you, there are no Syrian officials in the government to help us, no diplomatic assistance. Even when we go to the park outside, people will tell us to leave, that Syrians are not allowed. Sometimes there will be fights on the street, they will call the cops. They will tell the cops about people who don't have papers, they will arrest them and send them back to Syria. We stay at home as much as possible, I don't have courage to go outside, it will cause problems.

Ayla has made many attempts to find a new job because her current boss is not paying her properly. But she explained that they will not hire her as there are not enough jobs for the Lebanese themselves:

I would like to change my job, but it's hard. They won't hire me because I'm Syrian. There are no opportunities here. They tell you they need people and then they don't get back to you.

Both citizens and non-citizens of the Lebanese state, cannot rely on their government to meet their most basic needs, do not consider themselves protected by their government and it forces them to search alternative networks to rely on (Cammett & Issar, 2010). The weakness or absence of the government causes insecurity and instability and influences people's opportunities and future. Again, this situation works as a two-way street, as the weakness of the government encourages people to rely on their sectarian relations. But strength of these sectarian relations has prevented the government and the society as a unity to become stronger (Maktabi, 1999).

Humanitarianism is shifting away from the traditional refugee camp setting. This shift is based on many valid reasons. In this case however, the lack of assistance, informal setting and high competition with the host community, is creating numerous problems. Mariam explained how the fact that many Syrians are out on the streets, looking for ways to make money, is increasing tensions with the Lebanese.

Now hate us more than before. Because a lot of Syrians are here and they don't have money at all and they are walking in the street, asking for money. And they don't like them.

Existing in Informality

Finally, current research also approaches informality as something as something that is purely practical and exists separate from people. My data collection however, suggests that it influences people's lives very strongly. Not only in practical ways, but also extending to their emotions, experiences and entire sense of being. If your life has no stability and you are not able to make any plans for your future, this affects every aspect of your life. Hayat was very explicit and open about how much this uncertainty influences her wellbeing in a very negative way. She felt like she was not reaching her potential, not using her talents as an artist. It made her feel like she had no purpose in life anymore and she recounted feelings of depression and hopelessness.

I am not going back but, but I am also not welcome here. I'm an intruder, an outsider. I won't go back because all my friends left, they are in Europe, all over the world. I was depressed when everyone left. I'm not close to my family so I have nothing to go back to, there is no one there. I would like to go to Europe but it's hard. They are saying they already have too many people, I wouldn't be welcome there either. I would feel like I was too much. I cannot cross the sea, it is too dangerous. And I don't have any money. There are many things that make it too difficult. I don't know about the future, I don't know where I will go. I am lost.

Refugee Existence in Lebanon

Identifying as Refugee

I started this thesis, knowing that I wanted to focus on refugees. This formed the starting point and this was certain before settling on the geographical location and the theoretical frame. I did not expect that the concept itself would be as complicated as it turned out to be. There are many ways to question the meaning of the term refugee. It is the context of Lebanon, its specific form of informality and the situation in which Syrians find themselves in this country that influences the exact meaning of the term refugee in this case.

The main reason why participants did not consider themselves refugees was related to their socio-economic situation, whether or not they had received humanitarian assistance and the circumstances under which they had left Syria. The latter is separate from the Lebanese context, so I will focus on the first two reasons, which are interconnected.

About half of the women I spoke to did not self-identify as refugee, even though they do fit within the official definition of: “a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence ... and is unable or unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country or return there, for fear of persecution.” (UNHCR, 2011: p.3). This definition does not say anything about a person's current situation, but relies on the reason why they are there in the first place. Fatima explained why she did feel like she was a refugee, but she understood why people had problems with the label:

Some Syrians who are living here, they feel shame if they say they are refugees. But those people were forced, it's not their choice, they are living in this place because they had to, they can't afford living in a better place. And they were living a very good life in Syria. They had their jobs, they had decent houses. They were successful people on many levels, but now they are living here. Those people are in the camp, that doesn't make them less. Maybe I will have discussions about being displaced or refugee, but it's same. Like many saying we are displaced, because we don't have the refugee rights. But being displaced or refugee, we are in this situation. It doesn't matter what the name is.

Syrians in Lebanon are not all in the same situation. Moreover, their individual stories are hard to compare. The clearest divide between groups of Syrians is caused by Lebanon's policy of non-encampment (Turner, 2015). The informality with which refugees are managed, or rather not

managed, has caused this divide. Participants who did not consider themselves refugees were often basing this statement on the idea that a refugee is necessarily someone that lives in a camp and is taken care of by a humanitarian organisation. Hayat explained that she didn't feel like she was a refugee, as she had been independent since her arrival.

I don't feel like I am a refugee, I'm an immigrant. Because refugees get help and I haven't had any of that, I do everything by myself. But I wouldn't want to be like them, I want to work I want to study, I want to do something with my life. I don't want to be dependent. Even though sometimes this is more difficult. I need to work to feel human.

Aischa expressed how she sometimes felt ashamed of being associated with the negative stereotypes that are attached to refugees.

So, when I'm seeing a lot of kids in the streets and women I feel ashamed. That they are Syrians and I'm Syrian because when I came here I didn't have money at all. I came, my family has money but I ran away from my house so I came without money. I didn't do anything, I was just searching for work, planning what I was going to do. And didn't take money from anyone, I was always living with pride and it was very hard for me. Yes, so sometimes I feel ashamed, what the fuck I'm Syrian and she's also Syrian. So, they are making the Lebanese people think that Syrians are like this and it's not like this. I tried for six years just to explain to people that we are Syrians, we have a lot of intellectual people.

Refuge in Lebanon

What has been important to realize for this research is that Syrian refugees in Lebanon do not fit a fixed definition. Every woman had her own unique story. But the fact that Lebanon has not recognized Syrians as refugees, has been harmful. Even though I do agree that labelling people as refugees can be problematic, in this specific setting, not recognizing them at all has caused even bigger problems.

And in the Lebanese setting, if people are receiving help, it stigmatizes them further in the society as it often ignites grievances among Lebanese who are equally disadvantaged. Then what do we do with this information? As soon as the international community labels a group of people as refugees, this carries a certain responsibility. A responsibility to the refugees and to the host community. If we do not acknowledge this, it can hurt both groups.

Angela Gissi (2018) conducted research on exactly this issue. She argues that traditional notions of the term refugee are harmful. She explains that it is demeaning, causes stigmatization and removes an individual's agency. But she also argues that giving people agency should not mean that the international community is relieved of any responsibility. She therefore argues that

humanitarians should be aware of this issue and that it requires further research to know what the effects are (Gissi, 2018). This is important in this case because Syrians in Lebanon have been labeled as refugees, but many of them do not have access to the assistance that refugees would in the traditional camp setting. The label stigmatizes them, but they often also do not benefit from it in terms of receiving help, as humanitarian assistance is not sufficient. Yasmin described the stigmatization she had experienced.

Here they don't offer to help you. They know that you are a refugee, they start treating you bad, *challas* you are refugee, you are less than them. They are better than you, they are not nice to others, only to Lebanese. You can see the workers, how they treat them in a horrible way.

Sanyal (2015) approaches refuge from an interesting perspective and argues that it actually creates informality. That the situation in which refugees find themselves, inherently creates informality and that this is maintained by humanitarianism. She argues that “informal practices ... become crucial to refugee identity and for surviving” (Sanyal, 2015, p. 31), which is very appropriate in the case of Lebanon. She also claims that “humanitarian policies of protection encourage the development of informality” (Sanyal, 2015, p. 31). She argues that humanitarianism supports people, but does not provide any sustainable solutions.

I agree with this statement. However, my research suggests that a policy of non-encampment, in the way it has been implemented in Lebanon, creates even stronger informality practices. In camps, there are organized systems and refugees have access to (limited) services and protection. When a government restricts the establishment of such camps, but also refuses to take on certain responsibilities, it leaves people in a state of complete informality.

Then, as people are not living in formal camps, most of them are working, because they need to provide for themselves and their families. Again, the informality with which refugee assistance is managed causes people to not have access to sufficient services and basic needs. But at the same time, they are not officially allowed to work. In a way, informality hits them from two sides. They are not taken care of, but also not allowed to work, which then again forces them to engage in illegal activities.

This is also where informality has become a more relevant concept, rather than spaces of exception (Agamben, 2005). The divide between refugees and urban citizens becomes less clear, especially with more disadvantaged groups. And again, this can easily add to existing tensions as

the two groups compete for resources (Sanyal, 2015; Rabil, 2016). This is also where Martin's (2016) *campscapes* come in. Her explanation of *campscapes* applies to the Palestinian camps, which were formally established. But it also applies to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. People are living in camps, but the fact that their accommodation has not officially been regulated, creates even stronger linkages with and dependencies on urban life and stronger forms of informality.

Then, how does informality influence the status of the refugee in Lebanon? One could also turn the question around and ask: How does the status of the refugee in Lebanon influence informality? This relates to Sanyal's (2015) argument. But instead of arguing that refuge creates informality, I argue that it reshapes and aggravates existing informality. During the first years of the Syrian Civil War, Lebanon received praise for its open-border policy. Its percentage of refugees is the highest in the world and Lebanon offers Syrians access, while many neighboring countries have failed to step up (Turner, 2015). But Syrian refugees in Lebanon do not have access to sufficient assistance, nor are they enabled to provide for themselves through legal channels. They are forced to live their lives in informality. This creates a very challenging set of circumstances for Syrians, but also for the host community.

When going back to the question of who actually is a refugee and why, informality also influences this. Refuge in Lebanon is not a clearly definable status. All Syrians are living in informality, but they are not all in the same position. Darling (2017: p.181) argues that the urban refugee, as opposed to the camp refugee, lacks legitimacy. I believe that this perspective sketches the situation Lebanon perfectly. Yes, people have much more freedom and flexibility, but they are not officially recognized by Lebanon as refugees. This causes them to have less access to support and complicates the situation.

Darling (2017: p.181) explains that "The lack of formal recognition of the refugee status or citizenship afforded to urban refugees has therefore been argued to exacerbate their vulnerability and has ensured that forced migrants merge into a larger pool of both undocumented migrants and citizens seeking to make a living in informal economies." It is precisely the policy of the Lebanese government that is creating this situation. The government's policies have put Syrian refugees in an extremely vulnerable position, while at the same time putting pressure on those Lebanese communities that were already most disadvantaged. In a way, these policies were strategic, but they have caused unintended consequences. The government has deliberately put Syrians in a situation where they cannot build stable lives, in the hope that they will return to

Syria as soon as possible. However, the fact that the Lebanese government is not managing its own country successfully is having grave consequences for the host community, causing tensions, grievances and harming the society.

Building Grounded Theory

Cathy Urquhart (2017) and Kathy Charmaz (2006) explain that there are many ways to build and write up a grounded theory study. The exact way in which the researcher decides to do this depends on the nature of the research. In this case, theoretical integration is essential. The exact position of this research within existing theory, ultimately determines its implications. The question is then, how does this research build its theory? Walsham (1995) suggests four different ways in which analytic generalizations can be made on the basis of interpretative research; development of concepts, generation of theory, drawing of specific implications and contribution of rich insights. He applies these generalizations to case studies specifically, but I will draw on the element of interpretation.

The development of concepts does in this case not mean that new concepts are introduced, but rather a revaluation of existing concepts. This revaluation is strongly connected to generation of theory. It builds on existing theory, which relates to theoretical integration. But by analysing existing concepts, informality and the refugee, and reviewing their nature in a specific context and from an individual perspective, it provides new insights into these concepts. This is then connected to the contribution of rich insights. Revaluating concepts, providing rich insight into these concepts and situating these concepts within existing research, all contributes to building grounded theory.

These concepts already existed but placing them in a certain setting and analysing them from a different perspective provides new insights. Revaluation of each of the two concepts has also revealed much about the other one. This has led to the main argument of this thesis, which is that: Lebanon's context breeds a form of informality, which increases uncertainty in the lives of Syrian refugee women. Informality is a fluid concept, which does not fit one definition. Its nature shifts, depending on the setting and in relation to which factors it is analysed. And this has also become increasingly true for existing understandings of the refugee, which has been challenged by Lebanon's informality.

Implications of the Research

The drawing of specific implications is related to significance. What is the meaning of this research? How can the results of this research be useful for this field? The scientific contribution was explained as gaining a deeper understanding about how informality is experienced by the individual and how its nature can shift in a specific context. What this research clarified is that existing uses of the concept fail to capture its multidimensionality.

The concept informality provides a starting point, from which this setting can be analysed. But the concept has proven to be more than that. While learning more and more about this context, my understanding of informality has evolved as I now realize that it captures both Syrian refugees and their Lebanese host community and explains a lot about the relations among the two groups. Informality binds together various layers of politics and society and the ways in which the two groups exist within these layers and with each other. It already existed before the refugee influx, but its nature has evolved and intensified. Informality is in a way, the glue that holds all these aspects together. It provides understanding of the Lebanese society, of the situation of Syrians in Lebanon and of the meaning of the term refugee in this setting.

Societal relevance was explained as addressing the situation that Syrian refugees find themselves in, but also the effect their presence has on the Lebanese host community. The data collection has provided an understanding of how two groups of people are forced to exist together and compete for lacking space and resources. Informality has affected this situation in both positively and negatively. On the one hand, it has allowed Lebanon to absorb many people quickly, as societal systems are flexible. But it has many negative consequences. There is a lack of resources and security and because the Lebanese also (partly) live in informality, they share this uncertain space. But because the two groups do not exist on the same level of informality, this creates unequal power relations. Informality has created a situation in which Syrians are vulnerable and prone to abuse. Informality is negatively affecting the host community and makes it harder for them to accept the newcomers. This also negatively affects the relationship between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host community.

Recommendations for Praxis

This section will provide recommendations on the basis of this research in combination with existing research. Recommendations will be directed towards practitioners in the humanitarian field and individuals on the higher levels of policy making and politics.

The Region

The Syrian refugee crisis has affected millions of Syrian people and many host communities throughout the region and beyond. The Lebanese government, as opposed to governments of various neighbouring countries, has allowed large numbers of Syrians to enter the country. The government has however, not been able and/or willing to protect Syrians and meet their basic human needs. The chances that the Lebanese government will improve their assistance to Syrians, appears highly unlikely. The responsibility is simply too large for them to bear, as they are already struggling to provide for their own society. It is therefore up to other parties, to take over some of this responsibility.

A very common narrative in European politics, involves urging that refugees should remain in their own region as much as possible. Even though some valid arguments for this case could be made, the current situation is simply disastrous and the number of refugees is too high (Amnesty International, 2016b). Human rights are violated on a large scale and Syrian refugees are not protected. It is up to countries with sufficient means to provide more (financial) support and take in more refugees.

In 2018, OCHA published a humanitarian bulletin titled *Lebanon's Stability is not Given* (OCHA, 2018). I want to emphasize the importance of this statement. Lebanon is a country that has been able to maintain fragile stability, but political tensions are still very much alive today. By putting this amount of pressure on its society and political system, Lebanon's stability is threatened. It has been reported that the refugee influx has caused tensions between Syrians and Lebanese, but has also increased existing political tensions within Lebanon (Rabil, 2016).

What is however very problematic, is the fact that several countries in the region, mainly the Gulf countries, have not taken any responsibility (Hanafi, 2017). These countries are wealthier than Lebanon, but they are simply refusing to step up. I argue that more international pressure should be put on these countries to take in refugees or at least provide more (financial) support. They simply cannot leave everything to their neighbours. If this situation would destabilize Lebanon, it would not only be harmful for the Lebanese and the Syrians, but for the entire region and this could lead to an increase in refugee flows. The international community also needs to put more pressure on Lebanon to improve its assistance to refugees and adapt regulations in order to protect basic human rights. Lebanon does however need (financial) support in order to achieve this.

The Humanitarian Response

Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil war, the humanitarian response has been extensive. In Lebanon, humanitarian agencies are the most important actors, in terms of providing assistance to refugees. This response is however not sufficient and the fact that Syrians are dispersed and not organised, has made responding more complicated. Humanitarian agencies have been overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees and are not able to provide for all. This causes many Syrians to not have access to much needed assistance and lacking registration services has forced many to enter Lebanon illegally.

Funding for humanitarian operations is lacking and the Lebanese government is working against instead of with these agencies. What is needed is an increase of international funding, which needs to continue until all Syrians have their basic needs met and are protected. The international community should put pressure Lebanese government to better cooperate with humanitarian agencies. It is unacceptable that they are not taking responsibility, but at the same time impeding humanitarian work.

Even though the UNHCR is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Syrians in Lebanon, Amnesty has stressed that ‘the UN-led humanitarian response is grossly underfunded’ (Amnesty International, 2016b, p. 29). From 2015, the UN decreased the number of refugees that is receiving support, even though their actual numbers have continued to increase to this day. It is unfortunately unlikely that neighbouring countries will accept Syrians in the near future. In the meantime, even though groups of Syrians have been accepted into several countries, these countries need to organize resettlements on a much larger scale. The current situation is unacceptable and especially the more vulnerable people are at risk, women being among them.

What emerged out of the data collection, is that if assistance is provided, this assistance is very limited and often does not match people’s actual needs. Many Syrian and Lebanese organisations are attempting to fill these gaps. These NGOs have local knowledge, which is extremely valuable. In addition, they provide employment to Syrians. However, coordination and funding is lacking. Something that could be very helpful is stronger regional coordination of local NGOs with the help of international support.

Another important issue that was discussed by participants is the fact that they often have many creative ideas on how they can improve their own situation and that of their community

members. This includes their individual positive coping mechanisms. They are however prevented from executing such ideas, due to the restricted situation they are in. Lebanon's policies are limiting their possibilities for contributing to the society. The Lebanese government should therefore be pressured to work with Syrians instead of against them, which could be beneficial for both. This could for example apply to starting organisations that assist the Syrian community. Existing networks are very strong and people are highly motivated to help each other, but they lack resources. This can make the Syrian more resilient and build even stronger networks, specifically also for women.

A negative side effect of the large humanitarian response is that it has increased tensions between Syrians and Lebanese. Many Lebanese from poorer communities feel that Syrians have access to services, to which they do not. Rabil (2016) emphasizes how important it is to be aware of host communities and how a refugee crisis affects them. As explained, this is very relevant in this context. In order to prevent tensions from increasing further, humanitarian assistance to Syrians and Lebanese should be coordinated and levelled. One way to do this would be to include local communities in aid programs. Aid is not only often exclusively directed towards Syrians, but the organisations are also often providing them with employment. Though this is positive for the Syrian community, it increases tensions and the divide between them and the Lebanese. In some areas, this causes certain groups of Lebanese people to be more disadvantaged than their Syrian neighbours. The distinction between the two groups should therefore not be as extreme.

If local communities would be allowed to equally participate in, contribute to and benefit from the work of humanitarian agencies, this could strengthen local networks and lower tensions. Ultimately, this might also increase resilience for Syrians, if they are embedded in the local communities in more positive ways, potentially making them less dependent on aid.

Limitations & Suggestions

There are many limitations to this research, most of which relate to the restricted possibilities that a master thesis offers. This applies to aspects like time, experience and financial means. This thesis does not construct basis for large-scale generalizations. Instead, it has explored the nuances of a theoretical concept in a specific field setting. And it has highlighted certain gaps that still exist and which deserved further exploration. I will address some aspects that would be particularly relevant to explore further in this case.

Other Voices

As mentioned earlier, a researcher can learn a lot about a country when considering perspectives of outsiders living in this context. It would however be valuable to also include the Lebanese perspective. It could reveal much about how the Lebanese experience informality, to identify effects of informality on people that do have Lebanese nationality. If the researcher would then compare the two groups, this could reveal much more about their relationships and the effects of the refugee influx on the host community. This can provide further insights into how assistance to both communities can be improved. Similarly, it would be relevant to include perspectives of Syrian men. This could potentially provide more clarification on the differences between the position of men and women. What are particular issues they face, that are different from the ones women face? Theoretically, it could provide another perspective on informality and how it affects different groups.

Different Groups of Syrians

The sample for this thesis is very diverse in terms of age, occupation, educational background, cultural and religious background. The women were also from many different areas in Syria, causing them to have had different living circumstances and reasons for leaving the country. If the sample would be larger and more specified on the basis of personal characteristics, a researcher could then potentially make more generalizations on the basis of these groups. This could also be done by comparing groups of Syrians within Lebanon, to determine how their situation differs. This could for example be done on the basis of living circumstances, employment, socio-economic status or by comparing various regions in Lebanon. If host communities would then be included, this could also reveal more about how certain regions in Lebanon have reacted to the refugee influx and are affected by it.

Humanitarian response

One of the most important questions in terms of societal relevance is about the humanitarian response. What is going wrong and how could it be improved? This research can only answer this question from the perspectives of these women. What would be extremely helpful is to conduct a large-scale comparative analysis of local humanitarian responses. Some researchers have started analysing the humanitarian response, among whom Rabil (2016), but this was mostly based on the large-scale emergency operations in the first stages of the Syrian Civil War. What would be interesting is to see how it has developed and what is happening now people have lived in Lebanon for several years. The bulk of refugee relief is provided by international organisations, most importantly UNHCR. But the government is attempting to limit the possibilities of the

UNHCR. It would be relevant to have a clear overview of which organisation is doing what and in which way they can complement each other. How can the response rely more on local networks, in such a way that it can become more embedded in the host community and be more sustainable?

Concluding Remarks

Informality has existed within almost all layers of Lebanese society and politics for a long time. Traditionally, informality has featured most often in research on economic systems. But in the Lebanese context, informality is all-encompassing. Informality has influenced the way the society is shaped and how Lebanese people function within this society.

Informality has also heavily influenced the country's ability to absorb the large influx of Syrian refugees. Based on my analysis of the perspective of Syrian women in Lebanon, I have found that informality negatively affects the situation of these women, their position within the society and their relationship with the host community.

The competition for space and resources is simply too high (Rabil, 2016). Many Lebanese people are afraid to lose what they have or that their living circumstances will deteriorate. Any people that might contribute to this deterioration, can be considered a threat. The lack of access to civil rights and official protection, leaves Syrians, and women specifically, vulnerable to abuse (Amnesty International, 2016a). This can be seen in many aspects in society. The fact that Syrians are not allowed to work and are forced to engage in illegal work, makes it easy for people to mistreat them in many ways. Informality is not necessarily negative as it creates a degree of freedom and flexibility. But most dominant in the participant's narratives was instability, insecurity, lack of opportunities and an uncertain future.

Lebanon is not coping well with the refugee influx and it is crucial that the country receives more support in dealing with this situation. Otherwise it will continue to negatively affect Syrian refugees, the Lebanese host community and potentially the entire region.

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Appendix

I. Vocabulary – Phonetic Lebanese Arabic

Akid	(For) Sure
Anjet	Really, for real
Challas	Enough
Darak	Police
Eid	Islamic holiday
Mah barif	I don't know
Haida	The thing
Haram	(It is) Forbidden, bad
Kaza kaza	Etcetera, blablabla
Ktir	Very
Fusha	Modern Standard Arabic
La	No
Mafi	No, none, nothing
Sah	(That is) Right
Service	Shared taxi
Shouai (Shouai)	Little, slow(ly)
Sousou	Darling
Yalla	Let's go
Yani	You know
Walla	I swear

II. Code Book

COMPARING SITUATION
Comparing: Life in Lebanon and Syria
Comparing: To fellow Syrians
Comparing: To Lebanese
Comparing: To refugees
CONTEXT
Context: History
Context: Politics
Context: Society
Context: Tension
COPING MECHANISMS
Coping mechanisms: Seeking alternatives
Coping mechanisms: Avoiding certain people
Coping mechanisms: Exercise
Coping mechanisms: Financial
Coping mechanisms: Help from friends/family
Coping mechanisms: Hiding Syrian nationality
Coping mechanisms: Marriage
Coping mechanisms: Not seeking support
Coping mechanisms: Not taking time off work
Coping mechanisms: Traveling abroad
Coping mechanisms: Using connections
EDUCATION
Education: Acceptance
Education: Opportunities
EMPLOYMENT
Employment: Acceptance
Employment: Financial
Employment: Nature
Employment: Opportunities
Employment: Syrian nationality
FINANCIAL SITUATION
Financial situation: High expenses/Lacking means
Financial situation: Housing
Financial situation: Opportunities
Financial situation: Positive
Financial situation: Supporting family
FUTURE
Future: Reasons for leaving
Future: Reasons for staying
Future: Uncertain

HOUSING
Housing: Camps
Housing: Finding housing
Housing: Syrian nationality
NATIONALITY (LACK OF)
Nationality: Consequences
Nationality: Details residency
Nationality: Eligibility
Nationality: Lebanese family
Nationality: Not a priority
OPPORTUNITIES
Opportunities: Freedom
Opportunities: Lack thereof
Opportunities: Language barrier
Opportunities: Syrian nationality
RELATION WITH LEBANESE
Relation: Friends
Relation: Nature
Relation: Prejudice
Relation: Religion/Sects
Relation: Syrian nationality
Relation: Tension
SECURITY
Security: Assistance
Security: Harassment
Security: Health
Security: Insurance
Security: Negative
Security: Positive
Security: Syrian nationality
STABILITY
Stability: Employment
Stability: Finances
Stability: Housing
Stability: Negative
WOMEN/MEN
Women/Men: Difference
Women/Men: Freedom
Women/Men: Marriage
Women/Men: No difference
Women/Men: Opportunities
Women/Men: Safety

III. List of Interviews

Nr.	Date/Time	Pseudonym	Age	Area	Occupation	Housing	Location
1	04/06/18 13:00	Mariam	33	Raqqa	Former Bank employee Mother/unemployed	Apartment with family	Outside on a bench
2	06/06/18 10:00	Leena	25	Raqqa	Mother/unemployed	Camp with family	Camp/tent
3	06/06/18 10:30	Karima	73	Raqqa	Mother/agriculture	Camp with family	Camp/tent
4	06/06/18 14:00	Nabila	34	Raqqa	Mother/unemployed	Camp with family	Camp/tent
5	07/06/18 09:00	Marwa	62	Idlib	Mother/unemployed	Camp with family	Camp/tent
6	07/06/18 09:45	Reem	58	Idlib	Mother/unemployed	Camp with family	Camp/tent
7	15/06/18 18:00	Hayat	30	Latakia	Trained GD & Artist Working in bar	Apartment with friends	Cafe
8	18/06/18 17:30	Fara	43	Idlib	Mother/unemployed	Apartment with family	Apartment
9	26/06/18 21:30	Heba	38	Village Homs area	Mother/unemployed	Apartment with family	Apartment
10	27/06/18 17:30	Ayla	46	Damascus	Factory worker	Apartment with family	Store
11	04/07/18 21:00	Aischa	27	Latakia	Dancer/Dance Teach	Apartment with roommates	Cafe
12	09/07/18 20:30	Yasmin	23	Damascus	Student Art	Apartment with family	Cafe
13	16/07/18 17:00	Hala	49	Aleppo	Student interior design/Mother	Apartment with parents&child	Mall
14	19/07/18 21:00	Raaz	31	Latakia	Restaurant	Apartment with friend	Cafe
15	20/07/18 22:00	Dania	28	Homs	Student hospitality /mother	Apartment with husband's family	Apartment
16	24/07/18 19:30	Rola	30	Damascus	NGO	Apartment with roommate	Cafe
17	30/07/18 20:00	Fatima	21	Damascus	Student PoliSci	Apartment with family	Cafe
18	31/07/18 10:00	Mona	29	Damascus	Journalist	Apartment with roommates	Cafe
19	31/07/18 16:00	Zahra	23	Damascus	Student Graphic Des	Apartment with brother	Cafe
20	31/08/18 18:30	Yana	32	Homs	NGO	Apartment with husband	Cafe
21	06/08/18 14:30	Nour	28	Idlib	Student education & business + NGO	Apartment with family	Cafe

IV. Interview Transcriptions & Audio Files

Submitted to the confidential database of the Radboud University