

**RECOVER:  
REPRODUCING CITIZENSHIP  
AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN  
SYRIAN REFUGEE CAMPS**



George Dickinson, Annabelle Giger and Louise Vandenberghe  
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Authors: George Dickinson, Annabelle Giger, Louise Vandenberghe  
Translator: Altayyib Alhosni  
Designer: Tutaev Design

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Cover picture: Sign at the Aabdeh roundabout, Akkar, Lebanon,  
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# 1. Executive Summary

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According to UNHCR, Lebanon hosts exactly 1,033,513 Syrian refugees. The true number is likely much greater: as of 5 May 2015, UNHCR was instructed by the government of Lebanon to temporarily suspend registration of further refugees. At the time of writing, this suspension remains in place.

Even this figure represents almost a quarter of the total Lebanese population, putting a considerable strain on Lebanese resources and their management. Lebanon itself faces a serious political crisis, with a presidential election technically ongoing since 23 April 2014 that was only resolved recently with the election of Michel Aoun on 31 October 2016. Poverty persists throughout the country, including Akkar district where the research for this report was carried out, and the seasonal patterns of migration between Syria and Lebanon have been dwarfed by the displacement of Syrian families into Lebanon, especially since 2013.

Forcibly-displaced Syrians are continuously arriving into Lebanon despite the implementation of policies aimed at discouraging them from coming and making it harder to cross the border. A region-wide humanitarian response – evolving under various names, but under the consistent header of “Regional Response Plan” – has been organised and led by UNHCR in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. This response has been continuously underfunded since its creation in 2012, levels of funding having fallen to hardly half of what was deemed necessary in 2016.

Many Syrians, who believed they would only stay in Lebanon for a short time until it was safe to return have now realised that the conflict is continually becoming more complex and that no cessation of hostilities is imminent. Their attitudes to life in Lebanon have shifted as it becomes difficult for them to distinguish what the future holds.

This study is a snapshot of a community, displaced by the war in the battle of Qusayr, settled in the northern region of Akkar, Lebanon. It offers a comprehensive picture of this community’s daily struggle, of its internal commonalities and differences, in order to begin to understand what life as a Syrian refugee in Lebanon is like. Some of the findings we made, especially on access to services and interactions with Lebanese and international organisations, can be extrapolated to picture the reality lived by Syrian refugees in general in Lebanon, which has been documented by many others. The picture we provide of the way this group defined itself, and within it its individuals, is less easily generalisable. However it tells us something about the way external factors affect internal mechanisms, such as feelings of identity, community, and affinity. The subjectivity of these social characteristics prevents their universalisation, but they reveal the existence of important, specific, and occasionally unexpected attitudes that will direct responses to future developments in war and peace.

In this report, we lay out the observations that:

**Syrian refugees are made more vulnerable in Lebanon by being denied a form a legal identity.**

Because Lebanon is not a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, it is not under the obligation to recognise displaced Syrians as refugees as defined under international law, therefore denying them the rights associated with this status. Additionally, the policies put in place since early 2015 to make their stay difficult in Lebanon, and the stop put to new registrations by UNHCR, has made the situation even more difficult. This lack of a legal identity, as physically palpable as the lack of recognised identification documents, is responsible for the vulnerable position Syrian refugees find themselves in the country. Difficulties arising from this observation in their everyday life include lack of access to healthcare, and to education for children, the increasing number of stateless children, and a restriction of movement due to a constant fear of security services. In turn, this has contributed to isolating, through mechanisms of exclusion and self-exclusion, the Syrian refugee population inside Lebanon, and increases the likelihood of violent clashes between refugees and the host population, if not in the present then in a more distant future when the young generation will have grown up. This research confirms a general climate of suspicion going both ways between Lebanese and Syrian, even though individuals have widely differing experiences and intuitions on the topic.

**Today, the Syrian population in Lebanon recognises that its displacement is set to be long term, and it expects actors from the humanitarian sector to adapt to a situation that can no longer be qualified as “temporary”.** Refugee communities – with a lived awareness of the complexity of the Syrian conflict that surpasses even the most negative of popular commentators – are increasingly pessimistic about the chances of a safe return to Syria. Their requirements have transcended immediate relief and basic sustenance to more developed forms of public support, including both physical and economic support like healthcare and livelihoods, and more subtle social recognition including communal belonging and local reconciliation.

**While respondents consistently defined the same pre-war Syrian identity, the experience of forced displacement has had important repercussions on the way they define this identity. These changes are not by nature political, they vary between individuals, and are therefore more difficult to predict.** The people interviewed for the purpose of this research all characterised the old Syrian self as mostly defined within interpersonal relations, which people were proud of – relations within the family, between friends, and between neighbours. This essential characteristic of Syrian identity has been significantly affected by displacement and the living conditions as refugees, asking people to re-prioritise values in their new way of life. The people interviewed testified to a feeling of a loss of identity in the sense that they could not practice the Syrian “character” in the same way they used to because of having to refocus on procuring basic needs to their closest family, and because of the climate of fear in which they live in Lebanon. This loss of identity was lived and explained in different and sometimes contradictory terms by respondents who had previously defined the old Syrian self quite homogeneously, thus showing how group

dynamics are affected by violent experiences. While they could be separated by different interpretations of the way the war and displacement have affected them, all respondents could be brought together around a collective memory of what Syria was prior to the war - good and bad. This important link between people risks being lost as displacement is inscribed in time and children grow up in an environment where the common collective memory will not be the memory of Syria before the war but of life as a Syrian refugee in Lebanon. This indicates a shift from a positive shared experience to a more negative one that Lebanon and the international community as a whole should prepare to deal with.

**Contrary to some expectations and international resignation, respondents emphatically reject a peace treaty that results in the partition of Syria.** Despite the appalling conditions of displacement in Lebanon, respondents reject what might appear to be the surest and most efficient path towards peace – and not just because of their own personal doubts about its sustainability. The idea of the unified state of Syria holds some special attraction to respondents, particularly as a way of protecting individuals from the perceived avarice of rent- and territory-seeking groups defined by homogenous markers of identity including ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation. In particular, the Syrian state – despite its global perception as an Alawi-dominated entity – is in fact perceived as a bulwark against the monopolistic intentions of groups of what respondents variously describe as Iranians, Shia, and Hezbollah.

## 2. Recommendations

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### ***To the state of Lebanon***

- Put an end to its state policy of systematic arrest and intimidation of the Syrian population.
- Recognise the situation by providing Syrian refugees with a clear legal status that will allow them to access their fundamental rights.
- Facilitate the existence of awareness campaigns and social cohesion actions to better integrate Syrian refugees in Lebanese society.

### ***To the UN and other humanitarian actors***

- Put in place better Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning processes that allow for better adaptation to the changing situation in the crisis (from short term to long term) and takes more into account the actual needs of the beneficiaries as expressed by them.
- Be more transparent about their programmes and activities and their funding so as to avoid perceptions of corruption and unfairness on the part of the beneficiaries.
- Support the mapping of humanitarian initiatives at the national, regional and local levels and raise awareness in refugee camps about already existing projects and services that are available to Syrians.
- Fund and support demand-driven, community-based, projects to better abide by the principles of appropriation and representation.
- Fund and support actions that promote social cohesion and relieve social tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities.

### ***To the international community***

- Donor countries who contribute to the humanitarian response in Lebanon should develop political strategies in parallel to their relief support to push for policies that recognise and provide status to Syrians displaced by the war in Lebanon - this would go a long way towards preventing the multiplication of stateless babies and risks of future violence within the country.
- The international community should find a way to give a voice to Syrian refugees in the political process that is engaged in attempting to resolve the conflict. This recommendation stems from the observation that most Syrian refugees do not currently feel represented by any of the warring parties and are therefore not adequately represented in peace talks.

### 3. Research Methods

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The necessity for this report arose from its authors' belief that the comprehensive description of forced displacement and challenges to identity in the Syrian context was underdeveloped. This report attempts an opportunity for Syrians to express themselves about their lived experiences beyond basic needs, and an attempt to introduce external audiences to their struggle in order to understand it better and create holistic rather than targeted responses.

The data founding this research was collected in Lebanon over the course of two weeks in April-May 2016 by a team of four. Thirty-four interviews were conducted, of which eleven were aged between 18 and 25 years old, ten between 26 and 40, eleven between 41 and 60, and two above 60. The sample included both men (15) and women (19). After holding a general meeting at the camp, introducing the project and explaining what interviews would be like, the team registered all those who voluntarily expressed an interest in participating. From these first registrations, a snowball sampling approach was adopted as those interviewed suggested we speak with others or introduced the project to members who had not been present during the original meeting.

Interviews were semi-structured, based on a loose questionnaire. They were conducted by the researcher in English, with interpretation into Arabic to and for the respondent. Interpretation means that some of the content or intention behind responses may have been lost in the process of translation; however all precautions were taken to ensure that respondent's testimonies were reproduced almost verbatim. Most interviews were conducted in one sitting, but some required that it be done in several. They were guided by the narrative approach of "guided autobiography"<sup>1</sup>, which consists of encouraging individuals to recount personal "life sequences" that are relevant to the research focus rather than asking them about the overall situation of the community. Turning interviews into apparent "casual everyday conversations" offered several advantages:

- (1) Researchers could create a climate of confidence that facilitated respondents' full and active participation - which is crucial in a community where a certain fear of talking openly persists because of political reasons;
- (2) Researchers could avoid asking narrow questions in a prescribed order, which tend to influence, and therefore bias, respondents' answers;
- (3) Researchers could adapt to respondents' sensitivity on a case-by-case basis to make sure interviews were not a source of distress and/or re-traumatisation. The discussion of sensitive topics was sometimes postponed to the end of the interview, or canceled, when it seemed that respondent's needed some time to feel

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<sup>1</sup> A concept borrowed from De Sardan, J-P O. "The Policy of Fieldwork: Data Collection in Anthropology and Qualitative approaches", *Epistemology, Fieldwork and Anthropology*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015.

comfortable with the idea of being interviewed or when they showed an obvious reluctance to talk about these specific matters.

(4) Keeping the discussion open enabled respondents to spontaneously discuss fundamental issues that were not initially covered by the interview canvas and therefore encouraged researchers to rethink and reformulate the terms of reference, focus and objectives of the study when relevant.

The prior engagement of three out of the four team members with the community played a decisive role in the gathering, analysis and interpretation of data. Their prior immersion in the camp community provided them with a broad intuitive understanding of its socio-cultural structure, codes and practices and of its members' backgrounds, struggles and vulnerabilities. This phase of "participant observation" also allowed them to gain a close and intimate familiarity with many members of the camp community, which undeniably helped creating an atmosphere of openness, sincerity and mutual trust between the research teams and respondents at the time of the investigation.

The unavoidable risks inherent to this kind of research in terms of subjectivity were taken into account at every stage of the research project to maximise the objectivity of the study. To offset the risk of bias, time was regularly taken between members of the team for concerted discussions aimed at re-evaluating and adapting interview questions and attitudes throughout the research.

This report includes many direct quotes as an attempt to represent respondents' opinions in the most objective manner - in their own terms - and to go beyond the ambiguity that can be associated with narrative or descriptive statements.

### **Limits to this study**

This report should not be seen as representative of all Syrians, or all displaced Syrians, not even all displaced Syrians in Lebanon. The study was limited geographically and to a homogenous community, coming from the same place in Syria. While this offers very valuable insight into the way displacement and war has affected them, and while this homogeneity was beneficial to our analysis, it cannot be generalised or universalised. Section 4 and 5 are the most generalisable sections of this report although the way people live and receive aid will vary according to the region of Lebanon where it is provided.

## 4. Context to the Research

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Since 1976 and the incremental occupation of Lebanon by Syrian forces until their departure in 2005, Lebanon and Syria have been closely linked. Ever since the establishment of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1916, some Syrian groups have claimed the restoration of a “Greater” and “natural” Syria that would include the Levantine regions that were separated from the country under the mandate system, including Lebanon. For many politicians (including the Baath party), Damascus is interpreted as a “big brother to Lebanon” which is located within its “rightful lands”<sup>2</sup>.

The Syrian occupation started with the sending of troops into Lebanon in 1976 during the Lebanese Civil War, making Lebanon a proxy to Syrian polices throughout the Levant, in particular those concerning Israel. Following UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calling on “all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon” and mandating the “disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias” in 2004, and the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005, Syria withdrew from Lebanon.

Between 1991 and 2005 Lebanon served as an important market for hundreds of thousands of Syrian workers, especially in the early 1990s during the reconstruction boom. The Lebanese ministry of Labour, typically controlled by Syrian loyalists, allowed non-registered Syrian workers to avoid paying registration fees and taxes. After Syrian withdrawal many Syrian workers simultaneously left Lebanon – something welcomed by the Lebanese population despite their undeniable economic contribution.

This shared history, the way it was experienced by the Lebanese population, and the fact that Syrian military occupation is a living memory for the vast majority of Lebanese, bears important consequences on the way Syrian refugees were welcomed into Lebanon.

### 4.1 The refugee crisis since 2011

The first Syrian refugees probably arrived in Lebanon on 28 April 2011, when around 2,000 people from Talkalakh crossed the border into Lebanon and temporarily settled in the northern area of Wadi Khaled<sup>3</sup>.

Then, and during the first years of the conflict, Lebanon adopted an open-door policy that allowed for the free flow of Syrians across the border without control or restraint, and without identifying the specific reason for their displacement<sup>4</sup>. Simultaneously, all political

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<sup>2</sup> Lebanon and the future of Greater Syria, Al-Monitor, 7 April 2013. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/01/final-collapse-greater-syria.html>

<sup>3</sup> ‘UNHCR Works with Lebanon to Help Thousands Fleeing Syria Violence’, UNHCR, 20 May 2011. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2011/5/4dd66d3e6/unhcr-works-lebanon-help-thousands-fleeing-syria-violence.html>

<sup>4</sup> Diogini, F., The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience, LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016, p. 11

parties declared an official policy of dissociation from regional and international conflict in the Ba'abda Declaration in June 2012<sup>5</sup>; whilst it made no specific commitments to the obvious refugee issue, it did refer to the 'right to humanitarian solidarity' as 'guaranteed under the constitution and the law'<sup>6</sup>.

Nonetheless, the government of Lebanon was both unwilling and unable to manage the refugee situation on the ground, and responsibility for their treatment fell to UNHCR and its partner agencies, who acquired substantial autonomy to deal with the situation at hand<sup>7</sup>. However, this did not lead to the creation of UNHCR-managed camps, as in Jordan. This was due to historic associations in Lebanon of refugees with tragedy, and the Civil War which many perceive as caused by the extremist and militarised Palestinian refugee communities<sup>8</sup>. For this, and other economic reasons<sup>9</sup>, the Lebanese government continues to refuse the encampment solution to the Syrian refugee crisis, even though most of the refugee population subsequently settled in de facto small camps throughout the country.

As the Syrian conflict was becoming apparently longer-term than originally expected by many, the Lebanese government's answer to Syrian presence in Lebanon grew tougher. The turning point was in October 2014 when the government unanimously approved a policy paper that laid down new measures to slow the flow of refugees into Lebanon by making their stay in the country even more challenging than it previously was<sup>10</sup>. This policy paper was implemented as early as January 2015. At the same time, as the longevity and the complexity of the conflict was becoming more apparent, so too was the national question of stability and confessional balance. This challenge took on an added layer of complexity as the role of the Lebanese Hezbollah in the battle of Qusayr became increasingly apparent<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Diogini, F., *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience*, LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016, p. 10

<sup>6</sup> 'National Dialogue', Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon. Available at <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/News/Pages/NationalDialogue.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Diogini, F., *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience*, LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016, p10

<sup>8</sup> Hanafi, S. & Lond, T., "Governance, governmentalities, and the state of exception in the palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(2), 2010, pp. 134-149s

<sup>9</sup> Turner, L., "Explaining the (Non-)Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan", *Mediterranean Politics*, 20(3), 2015

<sup>10</sup> 2014 'جلسة 23 تشرين الأول' (Session of 23 October 2014), Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Republic of Lebanon). Available at <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=6118>

<sup>11</sup> Diogini, F., *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience*, LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016, p. 20

## 4.2 Research sample



Map of Lebanon showing in red Akkar district (screenshot taken from © Google Maps)

This research is based on the interview of 34 men and women living within the same community; some in a camp-like facility, others in private dwellings nearby. Living in private buildings should not be interpreted as a sign of being better-off but of needing to accommodate sick or injured people (who cannot be accommodated in a camp), or that it is impossible to find a free tent in a camp to move in. The majority of these people come from the province of Homs, and in particular from the city and countryside of Al Qusayr which was the theatre of the 2013 battle that saw the victory of Hezbollah and the Syrian Arab Army over the opposition.

Most left Qusayr only at the last possible moment in 2013, when it became apparent Hezbollah forces were approaching the city and that the battle was about to start. Some however left before, and as early as 2011, fleeing the local fighting and bombing already in the vicinity. Not all respondents travelled directly to seek refuge in Lebanon: most first fled within Syria, close by to the city of Hassia for those who left before 2013, in the Homs province, or to the Damascus province, mostly in Yabrud, since the only way left outside of Qusayr just before the battle was the Qusayr-Damascus road. Most entered Lebanon through Aarsal, and some through Wadi Khaled or Beirut. Before settling in the camp or close to it, some people lived for a long period of time (up to a year) in Wadi Khaled, Tripoli, Beirut, or Halba. **Box 1** gives more detail about the kind of threats faced by Syrians attempting to leave Qusayr.

All came to this camp because they were related or because they used to be friends or neighbours back in Syria. Only two respondents were originally outside of the community, one coming from Damascus, which he left in 2014 to escape conscription, and the other coming from a north-eastern village which fell under the control of the Islamic State and which he managed to leave in 2014. Their connection with this community comes through the informal school created and managed by the camp community where they were respectively involved through their work with an INGO supporting the school, and because they became the art teacher.

#### **Box 1: The Death Passage** (فتحة الموت)

As Hezbollah and Syrian army troops were approaching to retake the city of Al Qusayr, many sought to leave as they feared being “personally attacked” (as opposed to being victims of blind violence from bombing until then) over the course of the fight. To do so, only the Al Qusayr-Damascus road remained open and its first 500-700 meters were in particular extremely dangerous to travel on. Many died on this bit of road, being shot at indiscriminately.

“You could only pass if you were lucky. As we took the road in our van the bullets started to arrive from everywhere. We were praying and pronouncing our last wishes, we were sure we would die there.”

“People were hiding on the sides before deciding to appear on the checkpoint, everyone was praying before trying to pass. At some point, a man driving a truck moved towards the checkpoint, everyone was waiting to see what was going to happen. They started shooting at him, and eventually they just bombed his truck.”

Of our sample, all those of school age were enrolled in high school and preparing for the baccalauréat when the war broke out and institutions ceased to function. Among those aged to pursue higher education, 100% of men respondents were enrolled for 40% of women. Of those of working age, 100% of the men and 60% of the women were in employment. 50% of the men had a job that required some form of higher education, as did 33% of women. Most women worked in the private sector, mostly on activities linked to farming and other handicrafts; while the majority of men (70%) worked in the public sector: in the police, municipal services, or education.

## 5. Lebanese Reception and Institutions

Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees which defines the status of “refugee” and sets the rights of the displaced as well as the obligations of States to protect them. Although several people interviewed in this study knew that Lebanon has no legal obligation to recognise them as refugees, the majority were not aware of the ramifications of this. The continual use of the word “refugee” (لاجئ) in the media (both international and Lebanese) and by political actors made it particularly unclear that they were not actually officially designated and thus legally protected as such. Even when the legal context was known and recognised, it was still difficult for the people interviewed to feel this excused their struggles in Lebanon, as many recalled Syrians welcomed an influx of Lebanese refugees during the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon – particularly when Syria is not a signatory of the Convention either.

### 5.1 Status and residency

At the beginning of the conflict it remained fairly easy for Syrians to obtain residency permits, and they could even stay without one as “access cards” were given to them at the moment of their entry on Lebanese territory, which had to be regularly renewed. However Lebanon changed its policy in 2014, switching to one that would discourage people from entering Lebanon or even staying. No new access cards were issued, and the Lebanese government asked from UNHCR that it suspended its own registration mechanism<sup>12</sup>. It became extremely difficult for Syrians to obtain a residency permit – **Box 2** attempts to describe the requirements – de facto putting the majority of Syrian refugees in a situation of illegality.

#### **Box 2: Being Syrian and applying for residency in Lebanon**

Documents required for a residency permit in Lebanon:

- A Syrian identity card (the ID can be expired, however it can sometimes be refused if it is not in good condition - e.g. if it is broken)
- For those having received one at some point: their expired residency permit
- A paper from the notary stating that the person is not working
- The UNHCR registration paper
- A proof of residence from the mukhtar of the region where the person lives
- A copy of the act of property of their landlord stamped by the mukhtar
- A description of the property
- The ID of the landlord
- A Lebanese sponsor who guarantees he will hire the person
- A fee that goes from \$200 to more if you have been in Lebanon for more than a year (a penalty fee is applicable)

<sup>12</sup> For more on this read Diogini, F., *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience*, LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016

Residencies last for a single year (unless the applicant's mother is a Lebanese citizen, in which case they last for three).

The whole process of applying for residency is dealt with by the General Security services. General Security is more or less inclined to grant residency depending on where the application is made. Within the Akkar region already there are disparities: those made in the mountain town of Mechmech tend to be successful; those in the district capital of Halba are systematically rejected. In addition to proving the criteria above, much rests on the discretion of General Security. Once a person obtains a residency permit they are automatically taken out of UNHCR "custody" and therefore not eligible anymore for receiving aid. If the application is rejected the person will receive a paper ordering them to leave the territory - this paper makes it more likely to be arrested and put in jail in the future.

Considering the difficulties Syrians have in obtaining residency, the majority has decided to keep living without this paper, making them illegal immigrants in the country and therefore subject to arrest at any time. Beyond the risk of being arrested and spending some days in jail this means that Syrian refugees are deprived of the protection that is legally associated with refugee status; it also means they are made even more vulnerable within Lebanese society.

The lack of status providing them with rights within Lebanese society means that Syrians find difficulties at every level of their life: they cannot register marriages, newborns, or the dead; they have difficulties enrolling their children into any kind of education; their labour is exploited; and they struggle to have access to healthcare services.

While it is possible to update your registration with UNHCR to reflect a marriage or the birth of a child (although it can take months to obtain an appointment to do so), there is no way for such things to be recognised at any other level in Lebanon. More than half of the women having given birth in Lebanon mentioned registering their baby somewhere as a priority. At the time of writing it is impossible for these women to register their children with any Lebanese institution - meaning also that the Lebanese state is not keeping track of the evolution of the demography on its territory. Typically the registration of a baby is done by the mukhtar<sup>13</sup>, and some NGOs work at helping Syrians obtain this registration. However if none of the parents have residency this is impossible, meaning that the majority of newborns will not be registered. Recently, some religious institutions have started issuing birth certificates which people believe will be recognised once they return to Syria. However they also stated that these are not recognised in Lebanon. Similarly, because of their status it is very difficult for Syrians to dispose of their dead. One person among those interviewed lost their son in 2014. It was impossible for them to find somewhere that accepted to bury him.

“ ***If we bury a Syrian between two Lebanese, is he going to corrupt them? Why is it so difficult to bury our dead?*** ”

<sup>13</sup> The mukhtar is a local political figure who, as part of his role, takes care of different aspects of life at the community level

In the end it was through the help of some Lebanese people that a solution was found. The system thus puts Syrians in a position of vulnerability towards the host population without whom they cannot have access to the most basic services of life.

## 5.2 Personal safety and security

While Syrians left Syria to seek a safe refuge in Lebanon, one of the most important consequences of their lack of legal status in the host country is to make them feel like they are not safe. In the early days of their arrivals (mostly summer 2013 for those interviewed in this study) people felt like they were left alone by the General Security services, but more recently they have felt like the victims of a more aggressive policy. Men are always more vulnerable than women to controls and arrests - no woman reported ever being arrested and having to spend any time in jail. People living in camps are also more vulnerable. Several people told us one of the reasons they had chosen to live outside the camp, in Lebanese housing, did so because they were less visible in this way and thus less likely to be arrested at home. None of the people interviewed who lived outside the camp had ever had to have contact with General Security in their home, but **Box 3** explains the circumstances in which Syrian refugees can frequently interact with the Lebanese penal system.

### **Box 3: Syrian and Lebanese prisons**

Some of the men interviewed had experienced jail both in Lebanon and Syria, all of them reported that Syrian jails were much worse than their Lebanese counterparts and that their treatment there was worse too. There was also the risk to disappear forever in Syria whereas in Lebanon jail time rarely went over a few days. The difference stays in the recourses that are available to them for getting out. While in Syria they had networks and could find help outside to uphold their rights or pay someone to get them out, in Lebanon they have no such networks to rely on and they do not know how to work the legal system – in many instances they were also not told the charge made against them.

In the words of one man:

“For sure the conditions in Syrian prisons were way worse than in Lebanon but back in your country you can speak up your mind, you can protest. Here you are considered as a foreigner, you can’t ask for anything. Whatever the corruption was in the Syrian regime you had rights and you could try to exercise them, but here in Lebanon it’s impossible, you have no rights, not even the right to live.”

Although people living in the camp were more vulnerable to arrests on a regular basis (the camp was raided twice between the end of 2015 and April 2016 and all the men present arrested) they also mentioned feeling confined to the camp to try to avoid arrests. In fact the biggest risk of being arrested lies at the checkpoints that dot Lebanese roads. In practice that means that people’s movements are limited to the region of the country where they are settled in, and even more often that it is limited to a small radius around the place where they live. The fear that motivates this decision to remain in the premises where people feel they are the least vulnerable greatly contributes to the isolation of the Syrian population from the rest of the host country.

In addition to this feeling of isolation, of living in a “big jail”, and of insecurity, many of those interviewed highlighted feeling persecuted in the sense that they could see intent behind the pattern of arrests. This manifested itself under different forms with men and women as they had different experiences of the security services in Lebanon. While no woman interviewed had been arrested and put in jail, a majority expressed feeling unsafe in Lebanon and at the camp, in particular because of the experience of the two mass arrests during which they were surprised in their sleep and seen by soldiers without their hijab - which was perceived as an important violation. At least one of them saw the raids on the camp and the way they were conducted as deliberate Lebanese policy targeted at pushing them to leave the country. Several men who had experienced at least one time in jail independently mentioned police staff telling them that the UN was giving \$40 to the Lebanese government for each Syrian person they arrested. **Box 4** illustrates a local example of how Syrians perceive their persecution by the security services. This contributed to the general lack of trust in any kind of institution or organisation outside of the direct camp community.

#### **Box 4: Perception of double standards**

During the first mass arrest at the camp, when the army surrounded it and woke up all families at dawn to arrest the men present, a mentally disabled young man (in his early twenties) was taken along with the rest of the men with no regard to his condition and put in jail for five days.

In the light of an incident that happened in the neighbouring town this was seen by the community as an emblematic illustration of discrimination against Syrians. In this incident a Syrian child had been raped and murdered by a Lebanese man who was diagnosed with a mental illness, allowing him to remain free and avoid jail time.

### **5.3 Public discrimination**

The lack of recourse available to Syrians in everyday life shapes their perception of the way they are being treated by the Lebanese state and by the Lebanese in general. Being outside the Lebanese legal framework also encourages their exploitation, heightening the perception of discrimination on their part.

Enrolling children in official schools is in itself a challenge because of the papers needed for registration, the tuition fee (even if it is low), and other costs of sending a child to school (transportation costs money but is also a source of anguish for parents who are scared for the safety of their children if they commute too far away). **Box 5** attempts to explain how and where Syrian refugee children receive education. But even when parents manage to enrol their child in a school that will provide them with a certificate, Syrian children are faced with other difficulties, especially the fact that the language of teaching in Lebanon is French. Moreover, out of the parents interviewed who had managed to enrol their children in a Lebanese second shift school, half reported that the teachers were careless with Syrian children and felt that they were not concerned with the success of the children but rather

wanted to earn an extra salary. One even reported her children being abused verbally and sometimes physically (corporal punishment) in the school. Despite these criticisms and the difficulties faced, the majority of parents wanted their children to be enrolled in Lebanese school as it is the only way for them to obtain certificates.

#### **Box 5: Where do Syrian children go to school?**

Some children managed to get enrolled in public Lebanese education in structures called official schools. These take place in the morning until 2pm and the curriculum is taught in French. It is really difficult to manage to enrol a child in such a school but when it is done, the tuition fee and school supplies are provided by the UN. Children obtain certificates at the end of each year they pass.

The official schools' buildings are also used to host another set of classes in the afternoons, put in place especially for Syrian children: this is called "second shift". Second shift schools are entirely funded by the UN through its partners (INGOs) and the teachers recruited must be Lebanese and not Syrian. Within the community interviewed the majority of children have now been enrolled in a second shift school after two years of unsuccessful attempts. Second shift used to not be able to provide certificates but this has changed and the children are certified when they pass a class.

As many children were left out of this system, informal schools run and managed by Syrians were put in place to make sure the children would not lose entire years of education. This is the case for the community which is the object of this report. They have chosen to use the Lebanese curriculum to facilitate a transition into a Lebanese school where the children can be certified.

There are other informal schools run by Syrians where the Lebanese curriculum is taught but in Arabic (the curriculum exists in this language but is not used in schools) with no explicit intention of having the children join a Lebanese school in the future. Some of these schools have managed to reach an agreement with the Lebanese Ministry of Education - with the help of Lebanese NGOs - so that they can provide certifications to the children.

The loss of their rights and the feeling of discrimination was most acutely felt by those working. They all highlighted their vulnerable position because of the illegal character of their work and how they felt the Lebanese took advantage of it. Many had experiences of not receiving their salary after having completed a job, and many mentioned that the hardest and least rewarding work was always given to Syrians. Only one person mentioned considering the owner of the factory where they worked as "a good man" and feeling like he respected him in the same way he respected other employees.

The same feeling of discrimination surfaced when the topic of healthcare was discussed. Almost all respondents had a story of being sent away from the hospital because they could not show they had the necessary amount of money to get the care. Some even reported

realising they had been asked to pay more money for an operation because they were Syrian. Some women who gave birth in Syria and in Lebanon mentioned feeling lonely and scared for their experience in Lebanon where they felt people did not seem to care. Most people do not go to the doctor anyway as they cannot afford it, especially in cases of serious illnesses.

## 5.4 Social discrimination

All these difficulties fuel a certain vision of the Lebanese by the Syrian population, and also shape the way Syrians feel they are being perceived. Most interviewees felt that the Lebanese population associated them with something negative, calling them “a virus”, blaming them for hygiene issues linked to the trash problem in Lebanon<sup>14</sup>, for “break[ing] everything” (e.g. water tanks), and for being “job stealers”. But the stereotype that was overwhelmingly mentioned was this of being called “terrorists”. When asked to conclude the interview with the thing that was most important to communicate in this report, many interviewees stressed the need to stop calling them and treating them like terrorists. This perception not only comes from the general attitude that Syrians face around Lebanese people but also from state enforced policy through the arrests described above, in which when a reason was given for such arrest it was for being suspected of being involved in terrorist activities.

Because of this, the vision of the Lebanese character was overwhelmingly negative too. Lebanese were accused of being discriminatory with Syrians, often translating in “mean and aggressive” attitudes towards them. When they were not showing such hostility and behaved in a nicer way many experienced and felt it as an attempt to abuse their position of vulnerability. One person saw this as a reflection of the fact that Lebanese people had no “values or ethics”. This perception was backed up by other interviewees who felt like the Lebanese showed no solidarity at all with their situation and were selfish people. One person expressed feeling betrayed by the Lebanese because of the role Hezbollah played in the battle of Al Qusayr and their responsibility for their forced displacement.

Despite the main vision of the Lebanese being negative, people refused to make their remarks a generality and mentioned that not all Lebanese behaved in this way. Slightly less than half of the people interviewed did not have a specific vision of the Lebanese as a whole and said it depended on the person. A couple of people considered that Syrian and Lebanese were the same, were “brothers”, and that even if the relationship was complicated at this point in time it would go back to normal in the future.

The negative vision of the Lebanese sometimes reflected in the way people interacted with the host population. 18% of the people interviewed said they only ever interacted with Syrians. The whole group was made up of women, meaning they did not really go out of the camp and thus could restrict their interactions to Syrians, and from their own community.

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<sup>14</sup> Al Jazeera, “Lebanon’s Capital Drowning in Ocean of Trash”, 26 July 2015, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/lebanon-capital-drowning-ocean-trash-150726083036505.html>

One man only expressly mentioned avoiding Lebanese people as much as he could. However, more than half of the people who reported having interactions with Lebanese people - sometimes to the extent of a friendship - (who represented 30% of all those interviewed) still expressed a general negative perception, mentioning how they felt abused and rejected. The good relationship was seen as the exception not the norm in the Lebanese attitudes towards Syrians. The character of the people thus described though was characterised extremely positively, with the interviewees describing the Lebanese person as “a sister”, “someone who saved [them] from depression”, “loving and respectful”, “friends”. The rest of interviewees mentioned casually interacting with Lebanese people, often through work, the neighbourhood, or public spaces, but again some mentioned that it was difficult to approach and mix with the Lebanese. Someone mentioned trying to approach Lebanese people at the mosque without success and consequently “giving up on the idea of making Lebanese friends” - since then they prayed at the mosque in the camp where it was deemed safer anyway.

Bearing in mind all of the above, it is not surprising that when asked whether they felt themselves belonging in Lebanon 85%<sup>15</sup> of people said they did not feel they belonged, nor wanted to belong. Of these people, a bit less than half said that they did not belong in Lebanon but also that even if they wanted to they would not be allowed by Lebanese society. In this case it is legitimate to wonder whether the answer would change if the people were given the opportunity to receive a status and access public services without feeling discriminated against. However a majority expressed the idea that their feeling of belonging somewhere (a territory) or to something (a state) was not linked to official papers or IDs. These people expressed their attachment to Syria and the fact that no matter where they live, they would always belong to the country they have lost first.

### ***Belonging isn't about a piece of paper, it's about identity.***

A minority of people said they felt they could belong in Lebanon if the situation lasted for so much longer that they could not see a time when they would be able to return to Syria. All those who expressed such an opinion were under 25 except for one person. They also seemed to understand the concept of “belonging” as a process of integration into society - through marriage for example, or an extended time living on the territory.

In these responses we can therefore distinguish two different understandings of what it means to feel like you belong somewhere. Those who mentioned not being allowed to feel like they can belong, and those who said they could belong if they could not return home, understood it as penetrating Lebanese society and feeling like they are a part of it, by being accepted by others as legitimate members of this society. All those who said they could never belong in Lebanon understood it as making it part of their identity and thus changing something in them rather than the perception of others. In any case, for none of them did “belonging” mean weakening their Syrian identity.

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<sup>15</sup> Out of the 26 people who reacted to this topic.

## 5.5 Rationalising responses

Despite the many obstacles Syrian refugees face in their everyday life in Lebanon, many acknowledged that the situation was difficult to deal with for the Lebanese government and had an impact on the lives of Lebanese people - especially the poorest. One person mentioned being aware of the political instability in Lebanon that has been characterised by the inability of the assembly to elect a president, thus delaying parliamentary elections since June 2013. Others acknowledged that the Akkar region was a really poor region with many problems and that some of the problems they were experiencing (e.g. the cost of access to healthcare) many Lebanese were subject to it too. Finally some rationalised the hostile attitudes of some Lebanese people to the memory of Syrian occupation which they know affected negatively many Lebanese. With this in mind, Syrian refugees do not expect the response to their arrival and problems to be entirely dealt with by the Lebanese State, of which they recognise the limits, however they do hold it responsible when it comes to the implementation of discriminatory policies and for the residency issue.

“ *I feel grateful for everything the Lebanese State has done for us even if it is far from perfect. Even if I am living in a difficult situation, I feel like the Lebanese are sharing all their resources with us.* ”

## 6. Humanitarian Responses

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Lebanon is currently host to many international organisations (IOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) which develop programmes that are designed to assist Syrian refugees where they experience difficulties - these programmes range from shelter and Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) to school to protection. Listed on the Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal<sup>16</sup> where an overview of the situation and activity reports are posted for the region, at least sixty-three<sup>17</sup> IOs, INGOs, and NGOs are reported to be working in Lebanon. This list does not include other NGOs (in particular Gulf NGOs) foreign and local that are in fact also doing work and funding projects for Syrians inside Lebanon, because they do not wish to enter the coordination process of activities led by the UN. The number of humanitarian actors present and active in Lebanon is therefore more likely far more than sixty-three. The funding requirements indicated by UNHCR to implement its Syria Response Plan grew from around one billion dollars in the first few years of the conflict to reach almost two billion dollars in 2016<sup>18</sup>. These targets were never reached but were originally funded at around 65-70%. Since 2015, coverage of the required funding has however decreased, with only 54% coverage in 2015<sup>19</sup>, and increased back to 63% in 2016<sup>20</sup>. These reports are not inclusive of other non-UNHCR funds received by NGOs (from foundations and directly from donor countries).

Syrian refugees are aware of the amounts of money poured into crisis management in Lebanon and other countries neighbouring Syria. The presence of humanitarian actors has not gone unnoticed, nor has the multiplication of activities put in place. But while programmes are being implemented, we tried, through this research, to understand how the aid system was perceived by Syrian refugees and what they really expected from the humanitarian sector.

### 6.1 Type and volume of aid provided

Humanitarian organisations contributed to some aspects of the building of the camp where the majority of the people interviewed resided. A Lebanese NGO provided the materials to build the tents originally, and later on helped with providing concrete to make the dwellings and the “streets” more lasting and functional. Another NGO helped install a water tank that is being used for kitchens and bathrooms. While these NGOs provided raw materials, the camp was built by members of its community.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>

<sup>17</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/partnerlist.php>

<sup>18</sup> See funding reports at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php?page=9&view=grid&Language%5B%5D=1&Country%5B%5D=122&Type%5B%5D=5>

<sup>19</sup> See funding report as of 15 December 2015 at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php?page=9&view=grid&Language%5B%5D=1&Country%5B%5D=122&Type%5B%5D=5>

<sup>20</sup> See Funding requirement section at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

In terms of basic needs, almost all respondents mentioned without a prompt that they received “the blue card” - the card provided by the World Food Programme which allows them to buy food in designated supermarkets - and were very positive about it. Many said that it was the most useful kind of aid they received, in addition to another card that allows them to buy fuel for four months in the winter to feed their stove. While the majority described these cards as “really helpful”, some also mentioned that these were not enough to survive.

In terms of education, humanitarian organisations were mostly mentioned for providing the opportunity to take vocational training courses - the women in particular said they could take sewing, cooking, or nursing courses. The camp school is also funded by one Lebanese NGO, which was seen very positively, and transportation to second shift official schools in the afternoon was supposedly paid for by an INGO - however they said they did not cover the number of children they originally said they would which was seen as an important betrayal (**Box 6**).

In terms of access to healthcare, services provided by humanitarian actors were an important part of interviewees’ experience. All the women who experienced giving birth in Lebanon mentioned the fact that the UN covered 75% of the cost incurred. However there was a discrepancy in the amount they paid for the remaining 25%: one person mentioned paying LL15,000 (which amounts to \$10) while another one mentioned having to pay \$200. A third person explained an NGO working in Tripoli entirely covered the cost of her giving birth - she heard about this NGO from one of her relatives who is settled in Tripoli. For other health issues, people mentioned going to UN clinics but noted that these were far away and required that they pay for transportation, which lessened the advantage of paying a reduced cost to see a doctor. Two mobile vans were reported to come regularly (either monthly or every fortnight) to the camp to give free check-ups to the children and see sick adults. They provide basic medicines for free and sometimes help with prescriptions, but again the availability of medicine and the cost of prescriptions could vary a lot. Going to INGO- run clinics was also an option mentioned by one person. Several persons with bad health conditions explained that they could not manage their conditions because they were never covered by the UN or other humanitarian organisations, which provided help only with basic healthcare. Thus in the case of a breast lump it was up to the family to find ways to fund consultations and operations if they wanted to treat it - in reality this meant the person could not receive care as the price was too high to be procured.

**Box 6: Corruption, incompetence, or miscommunication?**

A reputable INGO came to the informal school that is situated near the camp and where the children go to school in the morning. Following the enrolment of most of the children present in this informal school (around 500) in a second shift programme in an official school, the INGO offered to pay for the children’s transportation costs to reach the school which is beyond walking distance. Eventually they only covered the costs for 200 children without explanations as to why, leaving the community to believe that while they had obtained the money for all children, they kept almost half of it for themselves.

These services meant that a substantial minority of the people interviewed gave positive comments about the UN - in particular because they provided the cards mentioned above - and other humanitarian organisations. However it is clear from the different accounts given that the services on offer were very disparate and that, as has been said for services provided by the state of Lebanon, knowing the right persons was an important factor in receiving aid. 24% of the people interviewed also said that although they knew a lot of humanitarian organisations were concerned about their needs and were present in the region, they could not say what exactly they were providing at the camp or for them, and said they would not ask help from them on their own.

## 6.2 Inadequacies of humanitarian response

Over the total number of interviews the overwhelming majority of comments concerning the UN and other NGOs were negative. NGOs were seen as unreliable in terms of maintaining a constant presence, several people said that they “come and go”, underlining the fact that there was no continuity in the programmes implemented. Help was seen as coming at key moments of the year, in particular during Ramadan. Others said that although NGOs visited them, many times this did not lead to anything being put in place. As for the UN, people saw it as “powerless”, stating it had “broken hands”. In both cases this meant that the majority perception of the humanitarian sector was negative, generating a lack of trust in its representatives. Seven people stated that they felt like “no one care[d]” and that humanitarian actors were not helping them as much as they could.

An important perception overall was that the humanitarian sector was run like a business at the expense of the humanitarian objectives which should have prevailed. Many of the interviewees blamed NGOs’ activities for being mere business transactions between them and their donors. People felt they were being seen as beneficiaries and used as numbers to justify receiving funds. The UN, in its coordinating role through UNHCR and UNICEF was called “the head of business”. Attached to the idea of business was that of corruption which several respondents accused NGOs and the UN of perpetrating: **Box 6** contains an example of this. Discrepancies between promises and implementation were seen as a sign of such corruption, but it was mostly the ostentatious display of “luxury cars” and “sunglasses” that made people feel the money received by such organisations was not spent correctly.

Linked to this perception was that the Syrian refugee population - the “beneficiaries” of humanitarian programmes - were not being listened to and that, as a result, the programmes implemented by NGOs were not responding to existing needs. One person mentioned in particular that NGO staff, during their assessment interviews, did not leave room for respondents to answer for themselves but rather directed them towards certain answers: “they tell us what to say, they don’t let us say what we want”. **Box 7** illustrates a striking example of attempted humanitarian aid almost wilfully blind to obvious and urgent requirements. Others mentioned instances in which they asked for help from humanitarian actors in a specific situation (e.g. improving shelter to avoid floods during winter); the NGO they were in contact with said they could not help with the problem at hand but offered them a way to increase their food subsidies instead - the person refused as this was not what they needed at that time and considered the offer dishonest.

### **Box 7: What is it that you need?**

During the winter of 2015 the camp was flooded and water penetrated the “tents”, making the covers and mats that are being used to sleep on wet and unusable. Winter in Lebanon is generally quite cold and already a challenge in itself, but this particular instance was more of a crisis than the general discomfort of a cold winter in poorly heated dwellings. People were gathering in one communal tent around a heater to escape their flooded tents where they could not sleep. An INGO visited the camp at that time. They did not offer a solution to the flooding but instead came to present a project of psycho-social activities for the children. This was perceived as a provocation and created resentment towards NGOs in general.

At the same time, some private individuals (both international and Lebanese) alerted to their trouble decided to draw attention to them and in this way ask for help by standing in the rain until they managed to thus crowdfund new covers and mats. This was seen by the community as a success, and also a meaningful action.

These observations and perceptions led some interviewees to feel scorned or disrespected by humanitarian workers. Several gave accounts of feeling looked down at during interactions with NGOs, not only because of their expensive cars and glasses, but mostly because of their attitudes - looking disgusted when offered to sit in a tent, refusing coffee. People expressed their opinion that it was important for them to feel like they were being treated like equals, something they valued greatly when the person they interacted with showed it. As an extension to this observation one person remarked that they found it difficult to feel like they had to be diplomatic with so many actors because they knew they depended on them.

Among the main problems associated with the humanitarian sector mentioned during the interviews the topic of discrimination came up again and again. Those who had an experience directly working with NGOs or INGOs explained how they were paid less than their Lebanese counterparts. They were all aware that they could not legally be contracted as employees by the NGOs because of their illegal status in Lebanon, however they could be hired as volunteers and receive a symbolic amount of money which did not equate a salary. Interviewees knew that because of this “volunteer” status they could never obtain what a Lebanese person could get by becoming an employee; it is not this they perceived as discriminatory because they are aware of the law. However, some became aware that even in a volunteer position, for the same position, and the same level of qualifications, the Lebanese person was paid \$50 more than the Syrian. This was seen as an important failure of the humanitarian sector which was perceived as perpetuating the inequalities that Syrians are victim of in Lebanese society, while the expectation was for them to offset them.

On another level, people felt like humanitarian actors were not capable of discriminating between potential beneficiaries, based on their situation, to determine how and at what level to provide them with aid. A widow expressed her feeling that she was treated like any other family despite the fact that she was alone and had to provide for seven children. All of those who did not live in the camp but in private houses explained how they were invisible for humanitarian actors because they did not live in camps. Living outside of tents is being

interpreted as a sign that a family is better off than one who lives in a camp. But it was clear from our interviews that this was not the case. There are different reasons for displaced Syrians to live in houses rather than camps, all linked to some kind of necessity rather than a choice: sickness, injuries that crippled the victim, and lack of available space in camps were the most recurrent reasons for people to live outside of the camp. It is true that these people paid more for their rent than those in the camp, but this meant that they had to find ways to get the extra money, rather than that they chose their accommodation in accordance with the amount of money at their disposal. The same logic seemed to apply to the camp which is the focus of this study as someone explained how they received less help from the UN because they lived in “concrete walls”, qualifying the gathering not as a “camp” but as “a constructed gathering”. Finally, there was disappointment with the fact that humanitarian actors did not differentiate between Syrians displaced by the war, “bedouins” and “nawar”<sup>21</sup> people. Bedouins are a semi-nomadic group of people, meaning that although Syrian they lived between Syria and Lebanon prior to the war. Their normal way of life involves living in tented settlements and some have been present in the region for decades. Several persons reported meeting some of their representatives during focus groups organised by humanitarian organisations when they learnt that some of them received up to \$400 subsidies per month while all the people we interviewed received on average \$130. The people interviewed felt punished because they were trying to reconstruct the life that they have lost and have thus improved the quality of their dwelling since they first arrived and lived in makeshift tents. The improvement was seen as a sign that they should not get priority when allocating funds and it is being perceived by them as a kind of discrimination.

Linked to this issue was a problem of transparency, or rather lack thereof. This was particularly true of the amount of aid given to different people by the World Food Program (WFP). In July 2015, the WFP announced that it was forced to reduce its food aid to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries due to a lack of funding<sup>22</sup>; interviewees explained how the subsidy went from receiving \$45 per person per month, to receiving \$27 per person per month on average, but the amount varies depending on the family, and some have been cut off the programme. Several persons stated not understanding how the system worked and what the criteria used to make the decision to give, how much, and to whom, were. This created anguish over the fear of losing aid that was unanimously deemed as vital but also contributed to create suspicion both towards other Syrian beneficiaries and towards the humanitarian organisations (which are already seen as corrupt). The issue of lack of transparency was also mentioned with regard to the resettlement process, which people saw as being implemented randomly and based more on “wasta”<sup>23</sup> than on objective criteria.

These criticisms were also part of a larger observation that the way humanitarian programmes were implemented was not evolving with the situation. While some things were

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<sup>21</sup> Nawar (نور) is a term referring to Gypsy people in the Middle East. It is used in a derogatory way. These people are identified because of their specific way of life which distinguishes them from the rest of the population.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-forced-make-deeper-cuts-food-assistance-syrian-refugees-due-lack-funding>

<sup>23</sup> Wasta (واسطة) is a word referring to a person's network and that will allow her/him to receive special favours.

deemed acceptable three years ago when people had just arrived and believed their stay was only temporary, they are not any more as the conflict does not show any signs of being resolved and displaced Syrians see their struggle inscribed in the longer term.

“ *If NGOs weren't present on the ground and saying they're doing their jobs, we could maybe excuse them. But being here, and seeing no improvement after so many years, it's inexcusable.*

The immutability of the way aid is provided and delivered also accounts according to the representative of the camp (designated by the community) for the lack of trust that exists between Syrians and the UN.

“ *The UN is working, yes. But they keep making mistakes which they never recognise, and they stick to their old policies.*

### **6.3 Evolving expectations of the humanitarian response**

With the evolution of the situation, and the realisation that it might last for some time, some Syrian refugees in Lebanon have new expectations for the UN and other humanitarian actors; expectations that involve becoming more of a political actor, advocating for their rights, and less of a coordinator for the distribution of aid. Others have expressed a complete rejection of the humanitarian response, stating they did not trust any of the UN or NGO actors, and were not expecting anything from them anymore.

Syrians today, as represented in our sample, believe and expect that UN players inside of Lebanon should try to exert more influence over the Lebanese state. The persons having experience dealing with UNHCR with other Syrian activists mentioned the fact that each solution put forward by the Syrians was discarded on account that the Lebanese state would not accept it. This means that the UN is seen as a de facto partner of the Lebanese state, while it is expected to be independent and to fill in where people feel abandoned by all existing institutions. Several interviewees also voiced their perplexity regarding this apparent powerlessness of the UN in bringing about structural change in Lebanon in the face of the vast amount of money it received from many influential countries.

What people are now expecting of the UN, and of other humanitarian organisations, goes beyond the provision of basic needs such as shelter and food. They want solutions to their legal status in Lebanon, from which the majority of their struggles and dependency stems. Finding a solution to this problem would mean avoiding an increasing number of babies being stateless, providing children with the possibility to receive certification in their studies, and allowing safer work for adults, in turn allowing them to find the means to support their families. In turn this would avoid the possibility of an explosion of violence as disenfranchised populations feel more and more marginalised and excluded from the society in which they live.

In any case, the solution, as seen by the sample interviewed, is political before all. If the UN inside Lebanon cannot influence the Lebanese state into providing a legal status to Syrian refugees, and therefore affording them rights, the UN as the embodiment of the international community should work harder at finding a solution to the conflict in Syria so that they can return.

“ *The international community should help us, not just by providing aid, but by helping to end the situation in Syria.* ”

## 7. The Displaced Family

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The difficult living conditions faced by the community pose another threat to the upholding of the traditional Syrian family system at the camp. The lack of space and privacy damage family relationships by forcing relatives to live in overcrowded conditions or to split their families even more: “There is an issue of privacy. Every family - and we are many - live in one single tent”; “When you have your own house you can raise your children the way you want. Now I can’t because they are out all the time”.

“ *I feel that I have lost everything. My house, my kids (they don’t sleep under my tent because it is too small to host them)... The situation is out of control.*

At the same time, the high population density at the camp also has negative effects on interpersonal relationships at the community level. If living in close proximity to each other boosts some respondents’ sense of belonging to the camp community - “we can be there for one another”, others assert that they would prefer living outside the camp, even “in a smaller place” where the lack of privacy and family intimacy would not be an issue.

Moreover, it seems that parents’ struggle to cover their families’ “basic needs” does not always leave them enough time and energy to focus on their children’s education: “Parents don’t have time to sit with their children and tell them what is right and what is wrong”. Exhausted by long days of studying (morning classes at the camp school and afternoon second shift classes at the Lebanese school), children are not well disposed either to spend quality time with their families when they come home: “Kids spend too much time at school. They just come back home to sleep. They sleep while eating. They don’t have time to do anything else. They don’t see their families anymore”.

The war has geographically kept Syrian families apart, which has already greatly contributed to disturb their traditional “pattern of living”. If respondents insisted on the fact that “relatives [used to live] next to each other” in pre-war Syria, the reality of exile makes this tradition of family closeness difficult to maintain: “It’s been three years I live here (...). My brother is in Aarsal and my mother is in Homs”. This distance that the conflict has imposed between family members does not only result in feelings of sadness and loneliness, it also prevents people from carrying on with their customs and practices, such as the consultation of the elderly in household affairs: “In our family, we couldn’t override old people’s power but since the war (...) I am living without my relatives”.

## 7.1 Challenges to childrens' socialisation

Parents' apprehensions regarding the upbringing of their children are also caused by political factors. Families fear that raising their children in a "society that hates them" and where they are badly treated "only because they are Syrians" will encourage them to "grow hatred and seek revenge in the future" instead of "[instilling] values in them". According to some respondents, the "unclear" and "unjust" context in which these children grow up does not allow their parents to raise them the way they used to in Syria: "how can you tell them to behave well when the situation is bad and unfair?". For them, this education crisis will make it hard for children to "construct their own identity".

“*Children are like ticking bombs who are waiting to blow up.*”

## 7.2 Disrupted family roles

At the household level, traditional family roles have been turned upside down. Many children have to help their parents, either by "taking care of their siblings" or by "[leaving] school" to start working. This involvement of children in the functioning and survival of their families is taken very badly by the adults, who feel that they are depriving them of "their right to be a child": "They can't be like other kids who are just playing and this implies psychological consequences". These psychological consequences include identity issues linked to their forced early maturity: "These children are not going to recognise themselves. They don't know whether they are adults or children anymore".

“*Children have experienced things that they shouldn't have before getting much older.*”

Young boys are particularly at risk of dropping out of school because of the "economic situation" of their families. Even when their contribution to family income is vital, it is also apprehended as a risk of "[disrupting] family order and relationships", which is described as an "important part of the Syrian tradition": "If a child is supporting his family, he might think he is the one in charge and he will stop respecting his father and elder people like he used to".

## 7.3 Gender and displacement

Women and girls are often encouraged to study and work - to avoid poverty, entering the sex trade or getting married too young - or to marry young for financial reasons. Both tendencies represent a departure from the community' traditions: "How I can I be asked to [work hard] while my parents raised me to do nothing after I get married?"; "I know I was married early, I am not for it. It wouldn't have been like that in Syria".

“ ***Because [a girl] lost [her] father, [her] brother, [she] might get married. She needs to be strong, to get education and certification to [benefit from] a form of protection [that allows her to] not be used by anyone”.***

On the other hand, a few girls and women underlined that the past few years had a rather positive influence with regards to the definition and practice of both their family and society roles. They said being more aware of the importance of being educated and independent and of making their voices heard in their family and community environments: “On a personal level I feel less shy (...). I can express my opinion at home and my family listens to me more”; “The most important thing [we’ve learnt] is that women shouldn’t just be housewives. They should be more educated in case a new difficult situation occurs. They should be able to make decisions for themselves, to speak their minds and to contribute to society”.

In some cases, living in exile has also deeply disrupted traditional marriage practices and understandings. For some respondents, the perspective of getting married with non-Syrians has emerged as an option because of their regular contacts with internationals and/or of their wish to move forward with their lives, even if the situation in Syria does not improve in the near future: “I am married to a German woman. I applied to the German embassy in Lebanon to be resettled there”; “I could belong to Lebanon if the situation was going to last for long. I could get married with a Lebanese guy”.

## 8. Identity of the Displaced

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Displacement has not only altered the traditional fabric and patterns of Syrian society and its reproductions abroad, it has also affected the way individuals define themselves and describe their own sense of identity. What came out of our interviews was the observation that while a common and homogenous narrative emerged on the topic of what made the Syrian identity prior to the war, the experience of displacement affected individuals in different and sometimes contradictory ways that make it difficult if not impossible for a common narrative to emerge.

### 8.1 Memory of the Syrian identity

Overall, the Syrian character was described by respondents as one that displays human qualities such as being “generous”, “hospitable”, “good-hearted”, “kind”, “caring”, “altruistic”, “humanist” and “compassionate”. Respondents underlined how these qualities were particularly displayed in the contexts of relations and interactions with the family, neighbours, and friends.

“ ***You can recognise a Syrian person from the way s/he treats you.*** ”

The emphasis on these human qualities was not limited to the description of individuals; many respondents also used it to define pre-war Syrian society as a whole. As such, several persons pictured Syria as “a mother or a big home”, and likened the Syrian people to “a big family”, stressing the uniqueness they felt was attached to it: “You don’t find that everywhere”.

Many answers also underlined that this sense of social acceptance, solidarity, brotherhood and hospitality was equally driving Syrians’ relationships with foreigners. A particular emphasis, and recurring example, concerned the way Syrians welcomed - both at the individual and national levels - Lebanese refugees at the time of the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel. But several also recalled their experience with a German tourist who was hosted by the community for an unusual amount of time, because of the warm hospitality he was receiving despite not sharing even the same language.

“ ***Once we hosted a German tourist for two months. We called him Makdous (stuffed aubergines) because he loved the dish and because it was the only word he knew in Arabic and called everything “makdous”. He stayed for so long that the regime started being suspicious about him. The farewell party was really emotional.*** ”

Interpersonal human qualities were not the only qualifiers of the Syrian character used by respondents. Other personal qualities such as courage, ambition, passion, diligence, hedonism, humour, integrity, simplicity, modesty, pride and forgiveness were also mentioned. Some described the Syrian identity not through the character of the individuals that made up Syria, but by describing attributes of the country that they were particularly proud of. As such, respondents mentioned the Syrian history and civilisation - "Syria was the first Arab country that understood and applied the democratic idea in the 50s and that recognised women's rights and allowed them to participate in the institutions", Syria's diverse economy - "Everything was made in Syria – the cheese, the vegetables etc. –: you could find everything at home", and its safety - "I could go wherever at night and leave my door open at any time" - as important elements of the memory of the Syrian identity prior to the war. Here, it is important to note that although respondents did not phrase it as such, their current experience in Lebanon is an important factor in shaping such opinions. It was clear in many cases that responses also corresponded to specific hardships experienced through life in Lebanon. The difficulties already underlined for Syrians to integrate the Lebanese economy making use of their skills, and to enrol children in school, for example, made the levels of education, and the stability of the economy in pre-war Syria even more important in light of having lost them. Similarly, those who mentioned the safety of pre-war Syria deemed it an important characteristic in light of the daily fear of being arrested or persecuted by the Lebanese police or General Security. To this extent, respondents' vision of pre-war Syria can already be said to be affected by the experience of displacement and of life as a refugee in Lebanon.

Already, these observations allow us to see how the internal mechanisms that seem to define and shape the way individuals define the Syrian identity are primarily based on the way Syrians interact with each other and with others in general. This highlights the great role played by the Other in forging and redefining the community's collective identity, and thus already points to the fact that what could be construed as "internal" factors in the evolution of the Syrian identity are in fact "external" because of the importance of interpersonal relations in the definition of the Syrian self.

## **8.2 War and exile: evolution of the Syrian identity**

The primary impact of displacement on the way people construct and see the evolution of their essential identity has been described by some as a shift inward of their attitudes, in contrast with the outwards qualities highlighted before: "Because of the war, people started focusing on looking after their children and worrying about their basic needs. In this way, we have changed because we don't focus on relationships the same way we used to."

But beyond the agreement that displacement has meant a withdrawal from more outward-looking qualities, the way people have described how the war has affected the way they feel "Syrian" is not homogenous. While none expressed the feeling of not being Syrian anymore, they felt they had been affected in several ways, feeling more or less Syrian than before. Half of the people interviewed actually declared feeling as Syrian as before, or not being able to comprehend how this feeling could have changed because of the war and its

consequences. However, a substantial third of the sample declared feeling more Syrian than before the war. The rest expressed the feeling of being less Syrian than before. Such alterations were also noticeable with regard to the secondary Arab identity of respondents, of which the conception has been changed by the experience of war - as is detailed in **Box 8**.

### **Box 8: The evolution of the Arab identity**

“Arabs became silent while Syrians were dying in Syria.”

Many respondents recalled feeling Syrian and Arab before the war, though to a varying degree: “Before the war I was introducing myself as an Arab before describing myself as a Syrian”, “I felt both Arab and Syrian”, “I used to feel Syrian first and Arab as a second identity”. The Arab identity was mainly “taught” at schools through the use of a “curriculum [that] was made to convince children that they were Syrian and Arab”. Even though Syrians’ Arab identity was not always practiced - “before the war I felt that we were one Arab nation but I never directly dealt with any Arab” - it relied on strong feelings that were seen as reciprocal: “we loved each others”; “[we used to] care about each other”; “we were welcoming [each other]”. Respondents also built their Arab identity on the increasingly questioned idea that some fixed and common features were sufficient to unite them: “We were taught that the Arabic language was enough to talk about an Arab world while we don’t even speak the same Arabic and therefore don’t always understand each other”. Even if some interviewees had regular contacts with nationals of other Arab countries before the war, for many others, the Arab identity was based on the subjective “feeling” and “thought” that “[they] were all one” and that there was an objective difference between “Arabs” and “foreigners”.

The construction and understanding of this identity changed after the experience of war and displacement. A bit more than half of the persons interviewed who admitted to feeling part of the “Arab nation” in the past explained that they now rejected the affiliation, while the rest remained attached to the feeling of being Arab somehow.

Feelings of a decreasing Arab identity (“I feel less Arab now”), or of its complete disappearance (“I don’t feel Arab at all anymore”) translated a perception of the Arab reaction to the Syrian conflict as a “betrayal” and an “abandonment” by those who had always been described as “their brothers”. Arab states were seen as “talking but never acting”; this for many interviewees was an illustration of the fact that the “Arab nation” did not exist or at least did not make sense anymore: “we wouldn’t have had to leave our country if all the Arabs were one”.

Meanwhile those who continued to feel a connection between “Arabs” felt so because of a common experience of “facing difficulties”, and in particular in the experience of “dictatorship”. Respondents thus opposed Arab people to their governments, and felt “connected” to the former while they rejected the latter and accused them of “being divisive”.

The experience of displacement and statelessness has played a great role in reshaping the identity of a substantial number of individuals. Many respondents reported now self-identifying as refugees or as members of the local camp community. Among them, the majority compared their fate to what Palestinians have been facing for the last decades - "maybe we will be like them" - and a few to the state of other nomadic communities such as Gypsies. These respondents described displacement as a reality that has to be "accepted", as a de facto element that "defines [them] to a certain extent". From their perspective, identity is seen as an imposed label - by definition hard to admit - not as a deliberate choice anymore.

The experience of suffering and injustice, and their will to reclaim their own identity, has led some respondents to thus advocate their belonging to a community characterised by its understanding of "justice", "empathy" and "pain". These answers illustrate their decision to stop "[thinking] in terms of nationalities" and to claim their belonging to postnational communities such as "the category of the people who suffer", "who are compassionate" or even to "humanity as a whole". By adopting a transnational understanding of identity based on shared experiences, values and feelings, respondents do not only react to their sense of "statelessness" and to the strong relationships they built with other national communities at the camp, they also demonstrate their will to depoliticise their identity. In other words, the development of transnational nonpartisan forms of identity among the members of the camp community is the direct consequence of simultaneous overlapping circumstances including their loss of citizenship, the close ties they have developed with individuals coming from many different countries within the camp itself - "Here I met different people from different countries so I had the chance to understand how other people are thinking" - and their awareness of the risks attached to their assuming a political position in Lebanon.

**“ When Lebanese authorities asked me to which group I feel I belong to I told them I am part of the category of the people who suffer. ”**

Only a couple of respondents clearly defined themselves as Muslims. Their testimonies reflected the clear impact of the conflict on their religious practice and beliefs. In a context of political chaos, violence and despair, religion seems to have acted as a source of morality, as a stable code of conduct that has allowed them to refrain from entering the cycle of violence and from subscribing to the subjective and questionable sets of principles defended by the different warring parties involved in the conflict. One respondent made a clear connection between "[respecting] Islamic rules more carefully" and "[trying] to behave perfectly". While violence and instability have become the rule in Syria, being "afraid of God" was seen as a fixed ethical safeguard and compass still available to those who "don't want to hurt anyone". For more respondents, religion also represented a way to cope with the painful consequences of the conflict through the assumption that "everything" happens as a result of God's divine will, who understands and legitimises what sometimes remains inexplicable or unbearable to the human being.

“ *At the beginning of the revolution, I had no opinion on the protests. Now I think God wanted the war to happen in Syria, even if I wish it never started.* ”

Four respondents said that they did not feel part of any community anymore. However, these respondents still identified themselves as Syrians or Arabs during the interview. This apparent paradox raises the question of what determines membership to a group if it is not her/his sense of identity. As already discussed, the sense of identity displayed by respondents relies on a great variety of factors, which are not primarily related to politics. Those who declared that they currently do not belong to any community mostly used political arguments to defend their position. Their answers showed that their non-affiliation is due to the fact that existing communities are not able to guarantee public order and security and therefore to provide them with a stable and protective environment. For them, a community of belonging is not only a group of people who share a common identity, it is also a political society that should be strong enough to protect, guide and rule its members: “I don’t belong to any specific community, I belong to anything. Before, there were principles to follow, to abide by. Now I don’t know who I’m supposed to obey anymore”.

“ *I belong to myself.* ”

### 8.3 Dilemmas: coping with exile

The previous section has highlighted that it is difficult to identify a homogenous narrative when it comes to the way forcible displacement has impacted the way respondents define their Syrian identity, and their sense of belonging to a particular community. On the one hand, some factors often represent both a facilitator of and an obstacle to the emergence and maintaining of an individual’s sense of identity and belonging. On the other hand, the same sense of identity is sometimes supported by conflicting arguments. While these observations might seem paradoxical, they are in fact indicative of the identity dilemmas currently faced by the community. Thus respondents have described how the same situation impacted their sense of feeling Syrian in different ways.

Attachment to the country, as in the territory of Syria, could have diametrically different consequences on respondents. While for some, the geographical distance that separated them from their land of origin prevented them from feeling as Syrian as they used to: “You need to be in Syria to feel that you belong”; for others, this distance contributed to strengthening their feeling of identity because of the nostalgia attached to it: “When you are far from your country you feel more connected to it, you miss it, you dream of it”.

Similarly, respondents interpreted the scattering of the Syrian population over different countries, and the disintegration of family sometimes even at the level of one country, in opposite ways. While many saw this dispersion as the evidence and the cause of the harm done to the Syrian social fabric, which they saw as contributing to weakening their own sense of identity: “the Syrian community is obviously divided. Even family members live far

from one another”; others saw this dispersion, and the experience of displacement itself, as something that brought Syrians together and fostered their unity: “in Lebanon we met Syrian people who we would never have met in Syria. I got to know people from different Syrian cities that I have never visited. Our identity is strengthened, we all feel Syrian together”.

The levels of social cohesion were identified as weakened in different ways beyond physical separation, but through the experience of the war. While some respondents argued that the direct implications of the conflict - death, destruction, separation, fear, foreign intervention - had pushed them apart by creating a climate of mistrust and radicalisation: “You need to be extreme to be protected by at least one side of the conflict. If you stay in the middle, both sides will target you. There is a high level of mistrust between Syrians”; others saw the experience of war as a common experience of suffering that made them closer to each other and more united: “We are still united. Everyone suffered from the war, not only those who escaped to other countries. There is no normal place in Syria”.

The same was observable when it came to the effects of life in Lebanon and the negative perceptions of it - as outlined in previous sections - on how this was a factor for the redefinition of one’s self. Some tended to affirm their Syrian identity as clearly opposed to others’ prejudiced attitudes, and as one of resistance against violence and xenophobia: “I feel even more Syrian because people want to define us as terrorists”, “The Lebanese state calls us refugees but we define ourselves as Syrians”, “I feel bad about the way Syrians are treated in Lebanon. We will never do the same to people in need in the future”. Some respondents’ reassertion of identity and national pride was also mainly grounded in the comparison with the way they received Lebanese refugees in Syria in 2006: “Being badly treated by Lebanese people made me prouder to be Syrian. I remember we gave them the keys to our houses when they came to Syria (...) to escape the war”. Others, on the contrary reacted to exterior aggressions in a way that tended to downplay their Syrian identity, in order to guarantee themselves with more safety or avoid situations they found complicated to deal with, for example one respondent explained how he sometimes lies to taxi drivers about his nationality to “avoid talking about the war in Syria and about his Syrian identity in general”.

Similarly, expectations for the future of Syria had opposite effects on the evolution of respondents’ identity. The idea that a peaceful Syria could be recreated in the near future – thanks to the qualities of forgiveness, love and resilience that characterise the Syrian people – played a part in maintaining some respondents’ sense of belonging to Syria. This belief that the future could be brighter particularly stemmed from the fact that respondents could prove – and hence become aware of – their capacity of resilience through the difficult experience of war and exile: “I could not imagine before that I would have survived in such conditions (...) I discovered the impressive potential of human beings”. On the other hand, people who believe that the situation in Syria is not likely to get better soon – because of the “Lebanonization”<sup>24</sup> of the country, the intervention of foreign powers and people’s thirst for revenge – tend to question their identification with the Syrian society, citing doubts about its very survival: “there is no Syrian society left, just a hybrid society”.

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<sup>24</sup> “Lebanonization” conceptualises the idea of an internal break-up inside a country that is caused by its religious and other disputes, which make the country impossible to govern. For more details on the coining and evolution of the term see: <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/21/magazine/on-language-ization.html>

## 9. Membership and Memory of the State and Nation

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Throughout their interviews, respondents consider how their relationship with the Syrian state has changed. Against both our research's hypothesis and basic expectations, Syria is neither remembered most vividly as a provider of state services nor through the perspective of a purely local experience. Instead, Syria is affectionately recalled in its entirety as a post-nationalist protector of individuals from the aggression and avarice of ethnically, religiously, and politically defined groups. This section's conclusions include:

- Respondents perceive no attraction or value in a Syria divided by ethnicity – neither as an opportunity for greater political empowerment, nor as a way of ending the conflict.
- Although respondents agree that they themselves have become more ethnically-aware, they explain this as a recent development, and a form of self-protection that they were forced to adopt to survive in the conflict. In contrast, respondents believe that groups (to which they do not belong) have ethnically-framed ambitions for political power at city, national, or even national levels.
- Respondents do not appear to worry that individual access to political services could be jeopardised by these ethnically-motivated groups; and appear disinterested in finding ways to influence political institutions. What does concern respondents, however, is that state-level discrimination will be brought to a practical level typically managed by the local community.
- The integrity of the Syrian state is so important to respondents because it guarantees against everyday life falling under the influence of sectarian politics. It is more important as a provider of social protection rather than political service; discrimination by individuals is a more threatening concept than discrimination from institutions.

This analysis is not an attempt to rationalise individual narratives, but to aggregate as many responses as possible into a plausible representation of the sample group's attitude towards state and nation. The aim of this section is to better understand the significance of an ethnically-divided Syria, and therefore advocate more efficient, targeted solutions to resolution that would address motives for violence. Few assumptions are made in this section about respondents' preferred principles of social organisation; by doing so, this section attempts to describe statehood as it is recalled in the memory of the displaced, and therefore represent its most enduring characteristics. Throughout, this section considers the fundamental contradiction at the heart of large-scale social organisation, as first observed by Clifford Geertz: a desire that indigenous identity and culture is publicly supported, competing with the ambition for economic development and political freedom. In this study, we will see that neither holds strictly true: identity is rarely conceptualised in such a way that respondents insist on seeing its manifestation in state-level policy; and respondents rarely express enthusiasm for seizing the means to influence the direction of their state. Instead, respondents remember the state as a way of protecting individual identities from the perceived predatory instincts of groups.

## 9.1 The unthinkability of a divided Syria

Throughout, interviewees confirmed that Syria is ethnically divided in a way they perceive as both historically unprecedented and socially regressive. Each describes a transition from a diverse, tolerant, and multi-ethnic society into one where the dominant social perspective is based on ethnic identity. Before the war, “people were Syrian first” in a country where “religion and ethnicity didn’t matter”; Syria was “a non-racist place” with “all kinds of people, all kinds of religion, and a very mixed society” with “coexistence between religions: common celebrations, common living”. Its citizens were “so close together in the same places, and marrying between each other”. In contrast to Lebanon, where divisions between communities are “visible in regions, cities, and neighbourhoods”, Syria “used to be all one. All religious communities were living together and sharing one space”.

Now, respondents report that Syrians “interact with each other based on religion” and that “the whole community is falling apart”; one stated “I had never heard Alawi or Kurd or Turkmen or Druze before, but now I hear about it all the time”. Another describes “sectarianism [that] has risen in Syria. Before the war, I didn’t know or care about the religion of my friends”. Whilst the majority of respondents are able to recall experiences of corruption whilst attempting to access public services, it is striking that only one specifically attributes this to ethnic identity, observing that “all Alawis go to university because they are allowed to take the answers [into the exam] with them”. Respondents are split between recognising this new form of social organisation as a temporary aberration, and as an irreversible transformation. Some believe that if they are ever able to return to Syria, “they will be even more loving and take more care because they suffered so many injustices”, that “even if there is hatred, we can forgive people”, that Syrians are “able to forgive”, and that if the regime falls, they could return to Qusayr “and live with the Shia people”. One asks “We were all living together [before]; why wouldn’t it be possible again?”. Others, however, believe that “Syria is divided already, it will never be the same as before...even if the regime goes down, it’s going to be the same”, that “Syria will become a federal state, divided based on religion”, and that “[although] I don’t want it, Syria is going to be divided”. The presence of this inconsistency, however, implies the perception that all respondents recognise societies based on objective facts of identity over which citizens have no control (e.g. common ancestry, place of birth, race, and religion) as a regression, a default mode of social organisation that it is both desirable and difficult to evolve out of. **Box 9** below explores the observations of one respondent who already anticipates the loss of his previous home to sectarian division, despite having no experience on which to base this expectation. The value of this section of the report is to understand the extent of, and explanation for, respondents’ valuation of an undivided state. They don’t seem to know where they’d go if Syria was divided – if Syria was divided they’d lose their natural home in Qusayr. The historic home is more important than an ethnic homeland.

**Box 9: The unknown quantity of segregation**

Illustratively, one of the several respondents contemplating Hezbollah's occupation of Qusayr believes that, in the event of Syria's fragmentation, he would be unable to return home to Qusayr as it would likely fall within the newly-demarcated Shia zone. But precisely why this respondent anticipates encountering discrimination in Qusayr is unclear: he himself has no personal experience of benefitting from equivalent ethnic empowerment, nor of aspiring to do so. For example, this respondent says that, without distinction, "we will all go and fight to take back our land from Bachar, IS, and the Shia"; he describes Jabhat al Nusra [now Jabhat Fatah al Sham] as "the guys from our country" at the same time as recalling more than 27 years of Baath membership and a career with the regime's police. Sectarian division does not appear to be a mode of societal organisation with which he is either familiar or supports. Throughout the sample, respondents consistently (and paradoxically) present sectarianism as something instinctively aspired to by groups yet both empirically unfamiliar and innately unnatural to individuals.

**9.2 Artificial political sectarianism**

For their own part, respondents are able to identify how their own recent sectarian awareness arose. Respondents attribute their own ethnic awareness as a recent defence mechanism, but consistently perceive themselves as single individuals outside groups, rather than themselves members of rival communities. Several state that sectarian division was an alien imposition by government: "the regime did the divisions", "the government divided us, but the nation and the people remain the same", "the regime created the hatred at the beginning of the protests", and the Shia "were forced by the regime to hate the Sunni". Another respondent states that "the regime was racist, but the people were united". The responses suggest a perception that sectarianism is an instrumental form of social organisation sustained only by the power of a state that has come to rely upon it. However, none of these respondents believe that sectarianism is an inevitable component of government: "before the war, people were Syrian first"; "before, we were all one people"; and "the motivation for this division is the regime, so it won't be an issue in the future". As one respondent puts it "during the French occupation, all the leaders against the occupation were Alawite, Druze, Kurd – they were all fighting together against the French. We're proud they made the whole of Syria". Respondents recall a period in Syria's history where government did not foster sectarian division.

Consistently, interviews suggest that the reason that such an unfamiliar form of social organisation developed such stamina so quickly was a physical survival mechanism in reaction to this state-sponsored sectarianism. Respondents describe this as "after the war started, they became scared of each other, of what they think. Today they gauge people based on whether they might be with them or against them", and that "even if there is peace, Syria will still be divided because people are scared and look at each other in a sectarian way". One respondent states that after government interference, "Syrians began to fight each other, and became more vulnerable when expressing themselves". Syrian citizens were forced to recognise the significance of sectarianism as an indicator of violence and

danger. Respondents explained that whilst for political elites sectarianism was a method for consolidating power, for citizens it is a matter of survival. That respondents appear wise to sectarianism as a political project defies typical explanations of nationalism as a stealthy deception imposed on society by anyone powerful enough to manage its agents. For these respondents, such a project is clearly transparent; they acknowledge and recognise their own sectarian awareness, but explain it as a recently imposed political ideology that has to be acknowledged as the cost of physical survival.

### 9.3 Natural ethnic sectarianism

More problematic, however, is respondents' implied perception that whilst individuals might have recently learned sectarianism via its imposition by the powerful, pre-identified groups already and naturally bore divisive ambitions. Though interviewees might have recognised that their own sectarian awareness is a recent, arbitrary imposition, their responses imply that they believe it to be an inherent motivating factor for groups. Many respondents infer an automatic connection between group membership and a desire for ethnically-organised society. Responses indicate that the structure of groups, their hierarchies and authorities, are more opaque and more naturally sectarian than the politically-mandated sectarianism forced upon individuals themselves. Again discussing Qusayr's invasion, respondents variously state that "for sure the Shia will not accept leaving" the city; that Qusayr "will be Shia"; that "our territory will be Shia"; another that "Qusayr is now Shia". Several respondents refer to various relations who are occasionally able to return to Qusayr precisely because they are Shia. Enquiries subsequent to the initial fieldwork suggest that camp respondents believe around 98% of the reduced population that inhabits Qusayr is now foreign Shia, from Lebanon and Iran, mostly composed of military and party representatives of Hezbollah. Whether true or not, respondents believe that ethnic homogeneity is as natural to other groups as it is alien to them. There is a difference between the purely defensive ethnic awareness that respondents acknowledge within themselves, and this perception of ethnicity as actively applied to the characteristics of a city.

But exactly why respondents believe "Shia Qusayr" precludes their return is unclear. Respondents interpret the other groups as aiming to make place and politics reflect their identity. One respondent refers to the Kurdish involvement as "asking for their own government, which means that more division is on the way", automatically sensing that other groups have a nation-seeking agenda as a natural part of their group identity. A respondent who believed that Hezbollah aimed to extend the state of Lebanon individually had rather more modest ambitions: he would "have to go somewhere else in Syria [...] somewhere for his community". At no point did he attempt a reciprocating vision of a state for his own group. Attempting to describe his preferred post-war reconciliation process for Syria, for example, the respondent is unable to coherently visualise a sectarian state in which he would be the privileged majority:

The Shia and Alawi are responsible for this situation now and should be excluded from the future Syria. Most of them, even if they were not directly involved [in the war] were pro-regime and supporting what happened so they shouldn't be there

at all. When we come back we can negotiate it...I want to find a peaceful civilian way, but we need to be apart. [But] no-one will accept the negotiations. Anyhow now everything about Syria, what made it a country, we have lost.

This, despite saying elsewhere that he “could not accept it if Syria was divided”. Indeed, the respondent’s final comment that “everything about Syria, we have lost” belies a resignation that the exclusion of Shia from Syria to his own advantage – either as an individual, or as a member of a particular community – contradicts his own memory of the country’s fundamental nature.

## 9.4 Administering, not controlling, locally

Although respondents cannot precisely identify what makes a “Shia Qusayr” a threat at the political level, they can at the individual one. One respondent seamlessly elides international political ambition with its local ramifications: “There is no Syrian society left...when you were walking in Damascus you could recognise that most people were Sunni but now you can’t see any of them”, because instead, “right now in Damascus there’s around 11,000 Iranians” and “that’s the same situation [as in] Qusayr: 3,000 people live there now, they don’t speak Arabic, they’re Iranian, rebuilding the city”. Through this respondent’s own experiences, he is able to connect this political consolidation with personal consequence: he was “sent a photo [showing] that his land belongs to another guy now, and it was hard for me to see that, because my land cost me a lot of money”. Again, there is little appetite within this interview to formalise and privilege his own ethnicity within the apparatus of a state. But from this is an expectation of violence that begins to demonstrate the nature of what, more specifically, is feared from a Shia Qusayr:

A lot of killing will happen. If we come back after the regime falls, there’s going to be a lot of killing and a lot of revenge. I don’t believe we can live [together] and get along. People know exactly who killed who, and it’s in our culture to kill the one who killed your relative. It’s not going to be as easy as [other] people might say in the camp. It will be like Iraq. It won’t magically go away.

Once other groups start to be thought of as less political and more individual, then what makes them threatening becomes more apparent: less their capture of state processes and resources than their physical consolidation of territory that makes respondents so wary of them. This further reinforces the sense that the elite-sponsored political narrative foisted upon citizens has gained little traction: competition over political resources has little resonance with most respondents. Instead, a more natural instinct of group recognition is felt in reaction to a personal, physical threat to the memory of immediate surroundings. Ownership and improvement of a local community has a special resonance for respondents: **Box 10** contains a case study of how the community has designed an administrative structure mandated with providing local services like electricity, water, and construction. The concern of respondents is that groups’ state-level ambitions of governance will translate discriminatorily to local levels of administration.

### **Box 10: Camp administration case study**

The land where the community built its camp was found by one member of the community who had fled Syria as early as 2011 and was staying in Lebanon in nearby housing. Around the time of the battle of Qusayr, knowing that people would be arriving in bigger numbers, he started looking for a piece of land to rent where a settlement could be built. His landlord agreed to provide them with a piece of land that he would let them have for \$1,000 a year - it was a former land-fill. The next year the rent went up to \$2,000 after negotiations as he wanted to increase it to \$5,000.

The camp was entirely built by members of the community while materials were procured by a Lebanese organisation. With time they added kitchen and sanitary facilities (present in small numbers in the beginning) and transformed tents into concrete buildings. All plans and construction work was done by Syrians from the community, while they continued to receive funds from Lebanese and other organisations.

Water was an important problem in the early days. At first it was provided from the flat of the person who found the land, through a 750m pipe, but that was not enough. With the support of an NGO they managed to create a well that provides them with non-drinkable water. For drinkable water they have to go to the nearest town to fill up bottles from the source. However for a long time they were not aware there were such sources where people can access free drinkable water and were buying water from the supermarket.

At the time of their arrival, the Lebanese government still had a flexible approach to hosting Syrians displaced by the war and they were allowed to take some lines to access electricity directly from the pole. This however did not last long. A few months later, Lebanese men repeatedly came to the camp to cut the lines, so they decided to opt for access to electricity that could be maintained in the longer term. They requested a permit from the Lebanese electric company and set up an account like any other in the country. They pay for electricity every three or four months.

Concerning the garbage, they went to the local municipality to register their presence and provided a list of the names of the families present at the camp. One member of the community (the same who found the land) signed a commitment that he would be responsible for all of them. After that they requested to pay for their garbage collection which was accepted.

To pay the different bills, the camp is organised around a camp Committee, made up of six persons, representing 30 families. They are in charge of dividing the costs between the families residing at the camp, taking into account the family size and the resources available to each family.

This Committee is the result of an election during which the first members were chosen by the community. Later on they received training from an INGO on how to manage a small living community - training that several persons mentioned during their interview to praise its results. From this training also resulted the joining of women into the Committee. Today there are three women out of the six persons who make the Committee; the women sometimes send their husband in their place if they feel they do not have time to participate, even though they try to get involved as much as they can. The Committee does not work based on periodical elections. If a member of the committee wants to stop being part of it, s/he is replaced by another member of the community, chosen collegially. In any case, the role of the committee is not to rule life in the camp, "it is not about power", in case of an important problem they will invite all members of the camp to gather in a communal tent to discuss it together. The Committee is not a political tool but an administrative one, meant to make the provision of services easier for all members of the community.

## 9.5 Belonging nationally...

Recognising respondents' concern for administration rather than governance opens an analytical insight to the question running throughout this section: the basis on which respondents perceive a divided state as an aberrant regression. We can now appreciate that this local concern is also re-generated into a different kind of state-wide awareness that appreciates the right to land, objective opportunity, and territorial integrity. Respondents identified ethnic parochialism as a social failure with an energy that exceeds simply defending the rights to local ownership – there would be, after all, more straightforward ways of expressing this than by obliquely referring to the "Shia Qusayr". For many respondents, Lebanon (despite numerous and serious shortcomings) is an acceptable place for refuge because of its proximity to Syria. Respondents report that (for example) the rallies<sup>25</sup> held in the camp make them temporarily feel happy, but when they return they "feel that the territory is what is most important"; that they "like that I'm so close to Syria when I am in Lebanon"; that there "are a lot of places better than Lebanon but I prefer it because it's closer to Syria". One respondent says that whilst before the war she felt like she belonged in the Syrian community, "she still feels like that, but you need to get back there to feel like you belong again"; another that "at least in Lebanon I can smell the air coming from Syria".

This therefore goes beyond expressing concern that a divided Syria might result in respondents' loss of local territory; instead, it belies a much more abstract connection with the country of Syria. Throughout the interviews is a consistent focus on the indivisibility of the Syrian nation that would be incongruous if respondents were understood as concerned only about Qusayr and their local memories: "Syria won't be divided"; "I couldn't accept it if Syria was divided"; "I hope it won't be divided"; "it's impossible for Syria to be divided";

<sup>25</sup> Small rallies aimed at celebrating important events (such as Mother's Day or graduation ceremony for the children) are punctually held at the camp, always being an opportunity to celebrate the old Syria and the lost country.

“the government needs to have authority over all Syrian land”. Some express this even more strongly: “I was happy to see my sons die for my country”. There is clearly some value to the wholeness of the Syrian state, despite political expressions of this integrity failing to make an impression on respondents’ perspectives.

“***My son knows he comes from Syria, from the city of Al-Qusayr. He knows the name of what used to be our neighbourhood. If you ask him where it is he will tell you it’s in his heart.***

The transmission of Syrian identity to children is perceived as a priority concern by the community. Many respondents said the only reason why they were taking part in rallies was because they thought it was “important for [their] children”, not for themselves. Parents’ mentioned feeling worried about their children’s future ability to reintegrate in Syria in spite of having been raised abroad: “We need to teach our kids about their identities to make sure they can go back to Syria” and “feel Syrian”. The emphasis respondents put on identity transmission can also be explained by the fact that children are believed to be the future of Syria, as “the only weapon [they] have left before going back home”.

“***I was proud of everything in Syria. Even the air we were breathing was beautiful.***

Over the total number of persons interviewed, a third could not immediately, or at all, be specific about what made them feel proud of being Syrian, stating that they used to be proud of “everything in Syria”. This statement, holistic and innate in nature, reflects a recurring idea that it is compulsory and/or inevitable to feel proud and to be defined by one’s home country and already points to an observation developed later on that such a feeling does not and should not represent a topic for debate: “I was proud of being Syrian because I am Syrian”.

“***Everyone should be proud of his/her motherland.***

“***There is no place like Syria.***

## **9.6 ...not controlling nationally**

Yet despite this state-wide affinity, there remains little sense of wanting to control political resources. Indeed, most respondents affirmed that there was corruption and reliance upon *wasta* throughout the public sector even in their previous, pre-war lives. Although many emphasise the quality of public services in pre-war Syria, this is more a comparative exercise against their present plight in Lebanon than an unconscious identification of the most durable part of the Syrian state. Interviewers had to ask sector-specific questions – about education, health, and utilities – rather than have them related as a spontaneous recollection. When respondents were asked about what made them most proud of their Syrian

identity, the vast majority defaulted to discussing individual, personal characteristics: generosity, hospitality, pride, integrity, even their sense of humour. Many referred to less obvious characteristics of the Syrian state: the customs, culture, and traditions; the Orontes River; the fact that they speak good Arabic; and the country's natural environment. Despite this, no respondent suggests that they would like to see (or can even imagine) how such attributes would be formalised and protected under institutions of the state – despite the ongoing implication that they could be jeopardised by Shia territorial hegemony. Again, we see a belief that successful state-seeking groups would build a state not different in terms of whom it offered services and positions of power, but one where private life, local entrepreneurship, and community management would fall under state control. Fundamentally, whether rightly or wrongly, there is no sense of concern that in a Shia Qusayr respondents fear most being disenfranchised from accessing the resources of the state (and no sense of outrage that they will always be barred from controlling them). It could be argued that this is because respondents' memories of accessing state resources before the war are so consistent that they have not yet considered this possible threat – but with almost every single respondent able to report on discrimination from state services in Lebanon, it's surely something they would have thought to apply to a post-conflict Syria. The concern of respondents is that groups will bring their state-level policy to the local level traditionally considered as a matter for community management – the kind of management seen in the previous section, where resources are managed to the maximum common good.

Involvement in the Syrian state was passive: as one respondent observes, Syria was “a safe place [...] the persecution happened to people who were involved in politics but it's not really something that was felt by others”; another remarks that he was not interested in politics before the war, as he had “no time, and it was forbidden”. Only one respondent refers to being politically-involved in Syria: “back in your own country, you can speak your mind, you can protest, but here I'm considered a stranger, and cannot ask for anything”. But he is also the only respondent to articulate a coherent vision for a state-like entity throughout the interview:

The general idea of an Islamic State is a great thing, but its actions on the ground are the opposite. I hope we will always see right as right and wrong as wrong, not everything is right just because it's [in] the Islamic State [...] the third caliph during the Ummayad Caliphate gave the other religions their rights and safety.

The coherence of this state is clearly significant to this respondent, as an instrument of aspirations and provider of institutionalised services. Indeed, this respondent captures something of the nature of other respondents' attitude towards belonging unconditionally to the concept of Syria, rather than one particular political dimension of it: one respondent reports what the Syrian side said to Egypt during the ill-fated United Arab Republic: “Syrian means political. That's something in your blood, like when the union between Syria and Egypt [happened]: ‘I'm giving a gift of 8 million people’”. As another says, “for the Arab people, the state just means the ruler”, and that therefore he “doesn't agree with the idea that because you're Syrian you have to belong to the Syrian state, or the Lebanese state if you're Lebanese”. There's a desire to belong to Syria, but not a Syria defined by any particular national agenda or international purpose. One respondent describes himself as represented

by “every Syrian person who suffers”, that political parties are only a “business”; another says that “it is important to differentiate between people and governments”. Such responses embody an affiliation to a state based only on citizenship rather than participation, where the state provides you with protection from the perceived avarice of groups rather than space for political expression.

Respondents do, however, articulate a distinction between active and passive political empowerment. Whilst a respondent also explicitly identifies that “here in Lebanon, they [the Lebanese] don’t have any obligations, they don’t provide [Syrian refugees with] rights”, so too do many others: the definition of a state is “good treatment and rights”, and in Lebanon many recognise their lack of rights - already made clear in the preceding sections of this report. Indeed, one says that “whatever the corruption was in the regime you had rights so you could try to exercise them” – this from a respondent who also recalls a time in Syria when, as a teacher, he was imprisoned for rebuking the son of a high-ranking Baath official. This is a simultaneous expression of protection and repression; protection, in particular, from the pre-assumed hegemonic intentions of ethnic groups. There is a one-directional relationship with the remembered state of Syria, where it is recalled as a protector but not as a vehicle. It runs counter to both principles outlined in the introduction to this section, where respondents require neither to see cultural identity enshrined by public protection, nor engage with the state as a forward-moving, progressive commonality.

## 9.7 Conflict representation and political reform

However, this does not mean that respondents are incapable of perceiving the nuances of political organisation. The nostalgia for the whole Syrian territory is not purely abstract: it needs some structural reinforcement. It is clearly not the case that interviewees would not consider the respective values and shortcomings of alternative political arrangements to the Assad regime, even under the overarching necessity of protection from the avarice of groups. As previously observed, even those respondents who affirmed they used to be proud of Syrian politics were actually referring to the country of Syria rather than to the Syrian current government. Their focus was indeed systematically put on the worth of the Syrian political history of the country and/or on the political climate in general, elements whose long-term existence well-preceded Bashar el-Assad’s presidency. In other words, the respondents’ disclosures seemed to prove that the aspects of Syrian politics that used to make them feel proud existed despite – rather than thanks to – the current government. Only one person said that she used to be a supporter of the regime before the war while many respondents denounced its unfair and violent nature and/or declared that they supported the revolution, at least at its beginning. Out of all the respondents who were prepared to discuss their position in relation to the protests in 2011 and the beginning of the revolution, slightly more than half expressed supporting the asks that were being put forward and the process itself. Of those remaining, the majority expressed being neutral and having no opinion at the time of the protests while a minority expressed overtly opposing and disagreeing with it. Uniting all three groups, however, is a sense that - properly maintained - the state should have been a force to counterbalance the avarice of self-interested groups.

Of the three groups, the one that showed most homogeneity was of those who initially supported the revolution. All hoped to claim more political rights and freedom; and all distanced themselves from what the revolution had become, expressing feelings of being robbed of an increasingly corrupt and violent revolution. Whilst many expressed their disappointment at the turn the revolution had taken, they did not renege on their original claims and values. And while many regretted that their hopes had been disappointed for the worst several expressed that they continue to support the original claims and values and hope for the best, as a way to rationalise and justify everything that has happened to them.

“*I supported the revolution until it became “commercial”. Now everyone follows their own personal interest and there are always more parties, more movements...*”

“*I can't accept to return if there is no freedom or democracy. It would mean we have fought for nothing.*”

Those who expressed neutrality towards the protests were motivated by different reasons. Some admitting to not understanding why this movement started, others saying they remained indifferent, also implying they did not feel the need to have an opinion on such events. All respondents who were enrolled in high school at the time of the protests expressed neutrality, stressing that they were not interested in politics at the time as they were completely focused on school and taking the first part of their Baccalauréat at the end of the school year. These young people found it difficult to process what had happened to them in the last four years and therefore did not know whether to regret the protests ever happened or not. On the converse, all adults in this group expressed regrets and said they wished the protests never happened and the revolution never started, seeing it as the cause of their present woes. One person regretted the revolution happened but believed that it could not have been avoided anyway, being an expression of God's will that had to be accepted despite the hardships. Finally, the smallest and yet most heterogeneous group was that of people who originally opposed the protests and did not support the claims that were put forward. While some people did not explain exactly why they opposed the movement, others explained that their position as state employee and the comfort of their life precluded them from wanting to take part and ask for change. One person admitted to hating the incumbent regime before the revolution even started, yet still opposed the protests. Half of the people who said they opposed the protests at the time explained however that they changed their minds once the regime started to repress the movement violently - one even supported that their sons take part in the militarised opposition as a result.

None of the minority who expressed an opposition to the protests mentioned regime change as a necessary condition for their return to Syria; conversely, 70% of those who supported them did, as a condition for their return, whilst only one explicitly said that they felt they could return even if the regime remained intact. Overall the majority of respondents

mentioned either “safety”, “security”, or “peace” as the most important condition to return to Syria - almost all those who responded mentioned it as the first thing that needed to exist for them to consider going back. Slightly under half stated that they would not go back as long as the Islamic State existed and was active in the country. Strikingly, only one respondent explicitly stated that the only condition for their return would be the withdrawal of Hezbollah forces from Syria despite the unanimity amongst respondents of the dangers of a Shia-occupied Qusayr.

What is critical, despite the variety of these three responses, is that all three groups are considering their return from a national-level perspective, the regime and IS being seen as the most threatening forces in Syria today. Even whilst many respondents focus specifically on the “Shia Qusayr”, it is also clear that the political process that is being monitored and the developments that will have the most impact on their decision to return will happen at the national level.

## 9.8 Syria, the perceived post-nation-state

Once respondents’ combined valuation of the Syrian state’s integrity and protector is recognised, their opposition to its division becomes explicable. If the state itself can be compromised by the ambition of ethnically-defined groups, so too can its individuals. The Syrian state must be believed strong against groups to protect individuals who do not believe themselves as having such a natural surrogate. Respondents here understand a state not through its purpose but through its facilitation of the nation: one respondent identifies the genesis of the war within people who “were not so aware of the concept of belonging to the nation”, another defines the state as “a space [...] where the different communities respect each other and merge into one indivisible nation”. Syria is described by respondents as “the homeland, like your mother or a big home”, the “mother and father”, as somewhere that once “took care of you”, somewhere where she felt “protected”, and a “homeland”, where “everything was available to you [...] most importantly security”.

What makes the Syrian state so critical is a way of disaggregating communities into individuals whose behaviour is regulated by the state, and protecting individuals from their perceptions of the predatory ambitions of groups (if not necessarily from the state itself). This is a post-nationalism, a desire for a state to actively impose a new identity upon the population, and a new way of describing the state as a form of social organisation in itself. This is not simply a rephrasing of “civic” nationalism, which implies an engagement with all the different mechanisms of power – we have seen that respondents are not primarily concerned what the state can provide them. Instead, respondents look to the state as a counter-balancing organisational force to groups, an aspiration to a society where individuals relate to the state without any modifying factor in between. Such revelations advise against a partition solution for Syria, thereby re-igniting a type of social organisation that many respondents wish to see eroded to the levels before it was leveraged for support by the regime.

