

Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A book Review of Şahin-Mencütek, Z., Kaya, A., & Rothman, S. B. (2023). *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Between Reception and Integration* (2nd ed). Springer.

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Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Between Reception and Integration is a meticulously crafted book that delves deep into the complex dynamics of Turkey's refugee situation and Turkey's response to the Syrian mass migration from 2011 to 2021. This volume takes readers on an exciting journey to explore Syrian refugees' experiences in three areas: reception, protection, and integration. These policy fields serve as crucial milestones on their path towards adapting to new lives Turkey, underscoring how the refugee's conditions and encounters are shaped by Turkey's political, institutional, and cultural factors. Strategic temporality serves as the guiding force for this book, which is defined as "a governance strategy that intentionally produced to control and manage displaced people by governing actors" (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2023, p. 5). This theoretical model relies on a set of inter-connected concepts including liminality, uncertainty, ambiguity, and ad-hoc solutions. More concretely, strategic temporality involves providing forcibly displaced Syrians with an ambiguous and temporary legal status as well as placing them in transient reception arrangements using short-term integration approaches. Through this theoretical model, the authors have successfully provided a sweeping account of Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, dissecting the multifaceted dimensions of governance, refugees' agency, and societal roles, while capturing the transformations that took place during this period.

The book is structured into six chapters, with each chapter providing a seamless and coherent flow to the next. After laying the groundwork and giving the necessary background information and context, the first chapter highlights the various aspects of strategic temporality such as refugee transitionality and vulnerability in the aftermath of political changes. Special emphasis is put on the interplay of complexity and agency within the refugee governance system. Chapter 2 provides a deep dive into the institutional, legal, and political dimensions shaping Turkey's approach to refugees, and it highlights the multilevel governance structure, identifies key actors, and captures shifts in political discourse as well. The chapter maps the evolution of policy responses, from an "open-door" approach to phases of burden-sharing and eventual restriction. The project's strength is further amplified in Chapter 3, where the authors illuminate on the reception system for Syrian refugees in the country established in 2011. Keeping a keen eye for detail and nuance, the chapter examines the formulation of temporary protection policies and practices, traces the shifts in discourse and narrative, and elucidates on the evolving material reception conditions and other dynamics within the refugee population.

Building from this framework, Chapter 4 explores the intricacies of Turkey's asylum and refugee protection regime, dissecting the implications of strategic temporality on various segments of the Syrian refugee population. By juxtaposing with the Afghan refugees, a particularly compelling lens is provided for making insightful comparisons with the Syrian refugee situation. The focus shifts to integration in Chapter 5, where the authors elaborate on the impact of strategic temporality on Syrians' integration efforts. Through a careful examination of labour market limited integration, education, housing, health care access, and psychological well-being, the chapter presents a balanced view of integration's challenges within the confines of temporality. The analysis is supported by numerous testimonies of the refugees and other stakeholders including central government officials, representatives from sub-national state institutions and domestic NGOs. The final chapter offers a succinct summary, restating the framework and argument of the book.

This work offers an in-depth coverage of the Syrian refugee situation in Turkey, providing readers with well-contextualized analysis and identification of key players and aspects of multi-level governance at the local, national and EU level. It captures the transformations happening at both the societal and official state level well. In the beginning, Syrians were embraced by the "Ansar spirit" the religious-based discourse promoted by Turkish politicians who portray the reception of Syrian refugees as an act of benevolence and hospitality towards Muslim brothers and sisters akin to how the Medina residents wholeheartedly welcomed the prosecuted Muslims of Mecca. The evolution of an initial welcoming approach to discourse

that emphasized Syrians' return was well documented, highlighting how perceptions shifted in response to changing circumstances, particularly a deteriorating economic situation and prolonged conflict in Syria. The momentum of public demands and the loud calls for the Syrians' return are gaining strength, a sentiment that finds resonance in the actions of vote-seeking political opposition parties as well. Beyond the mere comprehensive coverage of the subject matter, what truly stands out is the quality of field research conducted, which has been instrumental in bringing about this insightful book. The project involved primary data-collection in multiple Turkish cities that included interviews, observations, and focus groups with key actors at the central state level, representatives of local governments, experts working for international organisations, and social workers from NGOs. The authors' extensive use of testimonies, interviews, and legal knowledge certainly adds to the rigor of this study.

Relatedly, the book's sobering tone elevates it beyond the confines of positivist scholarship, showcasing a unique strength in blending both empirical and interpretive approaches. A voice for refugee advocacy, this work illuminates the formidable challenges refugees confront when manoeuvring through a system rife with uncertainty. As a result of this quality field research and empirically-drive analysis, the book successfully captures the nuances and dynamics of continuity and change in both the common practices, discourses, and policy areas of this refugees' situation. Although undeniably disheartening and saddening to read, this volume provides an authentic portrayal of the difficulties refugees encounter and the evolving reactions of the host nation. This solemn account allows it to present an accurate, balanced, and empirically robust scholarly work. The book's capacity to engage and educate extends even to readers with some familiarity in the subject matter, such as myself.

At the same time, I was hoping for a greater articulation of the overarching theory of the project- strategic temporality. I found myself agreeing with the authors that strategic temporality is "a useful concept to explain the complexity of policies, practices, and experiences in governing refugee situations" (p. 3). There were moments, however, where more elaboration and argumentation might have clarified the concept and reduced some confusion on its workings. Strategic temporality implies "intentionality" however this was never fully articulated as a core tenet of this framework, which created some sense of contradiction and inconsistency between the concept and the evidence presented. Also, the story presented in this book suggests that Turkey's approach to handling refugees was not heavily premeditated or strategized. During the Arab Spring moment, the Turkish government aimed to showcase its soft power capabilities by promoting a sympathetic tone and acts of generosity and hospitality towards "mazlum" Syrian neighbours. However, as events unfolded and the Assad regime's downfall didn't occur as anticipated, the refugee response was

adjusted to address social, political, and economic concerns. Changes in circumstances and assessments might have prompted Turkey to modify its stance, thus implying lack of strategic thinking in the first place. Unless the authors seriously engage extensively with the intentional and strategic aspects of temporality, "temporal governance" aptly captures the essence of what the authors currently expound in this book. Temporal governance is a broader concept that refers to the management and regulation of migrants by means of time (Reneman & Stronks, 2021). Thus, it denotes the ways in which time factors influence policy development, decision-making, and implementation across different sectors without necessarily invoking a calculated strategy to achieve such policy outcomes, which fits the volume's depiction of the Syrian refugee's situation in Turkey. For this reason, I believe the latter concept is better able to incorporate contingency and explain continuity and change.

A recurring concern that caught my attention while reading this volume was the amount of redundancy that has crept into the writing of this book. The reader can notice this issue even in the introductory chapter, with numerous examples of unnecessary repetition. While the subsequent chapters exhibit fewer redundancies, the issue remained unresolved. For example, a specific testimony was duplicated verbatim in two separate places: "Only 5% of Syrians know their rights. There is a need for awareness-raising like organising courses about it." (pp. 122,144). Although occasionally re-emphasizing key points is commonly practiced and may be encouraged, this kind of redundancy and repetition is indicative of a lack of effective editing, and it could potentially lead to a less engaged and distracted audience. The collaborative multi-authorship of the book might have contributed to this issue; however, it could have been ameliorated with better editorial quality to rectify this problem and ensure the book's clarity.

Despite these concerns, *Syrian refugees in Turkey: Between reception and integration* is clearly an authoritative, timely and up-to-date study on how Turkey has dealt with Syrian refugees since the early days of the mass migration that started in 2011 and continues until today. Aided by rigorous research and deep analysis, the volume has effectively addressed its main purpose and objective, unravelling the multi-layers of refugee governance and offering a powerful platform for informed discourse on a crucial transnational issue with global ramifications and repercussions. Despite its sophistication, this book also remains accessible to a diverse range of readers, making it easy to comprehend and engage with the arguments presented. The authors' exploration enriches our understanding of refugee dynamics, temporal governance, and the resilience of human agency within uncertain circumstances. For this reason, I would recommend this book to scholars involved in migration research, or Eurasian regional studies, as well as to the broader general public.

Bibliography:

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