Chapter 1
Introduction



1.1 Introduction

Just after the local elections in 2019, irregular migrants in Istanbul faced a months-long crackdown. The Ministry of Interior from the Justice and Development Party government (known as *AK Party or AKP*) gave Syrians until 20 August 2019 to return to the cities in which they were first registered. Although the time period was eventually extended, the internal controls for migrants became stricter. Migrants found themselves frequently stopped by police, and officers visited registration addresses to check if they were occupied. If irregularities were discovered, the official directive was that Syrians should be returned to the cities in which they were first registered. For non-Syrian migrants without registration, the result of police stops was often being confined to pre-detention centres. According to the Head of the Directorate General Management of Migration (DGMM) of the time, Abdullah Ayaz, "Operations in Istanbul target irregular migrants such as Afghans and Pakistanis. Even if Syrians are found without registration at all, they are not deported, unlike the claims in the media. It is not possible to issue deportation decisions legally about Syrians due to the conditions in Syria" (AA 2019).

However, lawyers and national and international human rights organizations described the summer of 2019 as being terrible for all migrants in terms of the numbers of rushed deportations and full busses of people from Istanbul being taken to border provinces and removal centres. There were reports of deportations of Syrians who had been coerced into signing voluntary return forms. There is a common belief among political commenators that the campaign in 2019 was driven by domestic political motives and a desire to give the message that the Government is solving the Syrian 'refugee problem' and maintaining 'order and security' in Istanbul, where more than a million migrants live irregularly. The operation was specific to Istanbul, raising questions about why the decision was not taken in Ankara and other cities but instead remained a local initiative. It does not seem to be a coincidence that it happened just after the ruling party's loss of mayorship in

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the same city. A few months later, Turkey started a cross-border military operation in Northern Syria, legitimized by the objective of repatriation and border security. It seems that there were multiple intersecting political -both domestic and regional- concerns and aims on the table at the same time, which had direct consequences for the lives of refugees in Turkey. Not surprisingly, these and previous incidents created "a strong fear among refugees that panicked them specifically in election times," a humanitarian worker related. Many Syrian friends told us that they had not left their apartments in months because they were terrified. Nevertheless, some deportees returned to Istanbul after a few weeks, this time feeling more susceptible to deportation, and many others tried to become less visible in public spaces. Simultaneously, they become more vulnerable to exploitation in their informal workplaces. Refugees' precarious situation only worsened when COVID-19 arrived.

This incident in Istanbul in 2019 is only one among many that illustrate temporality, complexity and agency—some of main the topics of this book--within the system of refugee governance in Turkey. Refugee governance is temporal because, despite a long-term, flexible approach on the part of provincial authorities towards the internal mobility of Syrians, the approach gradually changed when the political actor(s) decided to enforce a reception rule stating that Syrians have to live where they are first registered. The timing of the enforcement of this is strategic as it happened just after elections and just before a cross-border military operation. Once again, it became clear that Syrians' temporary protection status puts them in a precarious situation. The events in Istanbul in 2019 can also be seen as rather complex because the regulations for Syrians and non-Syrians, such as Afghans and Pakistanis, were quite different. This was clearly mentioned by the DGMM Director. The event also illustrates the agency of migrants, regardless of their nationality or legal status, as they looked for opportunities to re-migrate to Istanbul or found other tactics, such as further invisibility to survive. Sadly, this situation is not a one-time occurrence but is rather a recurring symptom of temporality and a complexity-centred approach to refugee hosting in Turkey.

Conflict-induced forced migration has marked the last decade of flows in different parts of the world, from South Asia to Africa, and from the Middle East to Europe. Protection, reception and integration policies, practices and humanitarian responses to forced migration in contemporary Europe and beyond are of great concern for state actors, non-state actors, international organizations, institutions, private individual actors and people on the move. The so-called Refugee Crisis in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed again how refugees are vulnerable to rapid changes due to external factors in different countries and across the world. The vast majority of forced migrants are only able to reach neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Jordan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Uganda and others.

One of these countries, Turkey, has become the main destination for forcibly displaced Syrians from armed conflict since 2011. In 2014, Turkey became the country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world, with more than 3.5 million Syrians. It also continues to be a country of asylum and a transit zone for irregular crossings of thousands of migrants to Europe, such as Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians and others, who were also forced to leave their homes for political and economic

reasons. The country's response to migration, including the roles of its governance actors, policies, politics and refugees themselves, is significant for broader regional and global social, political, economic and cultural developments.

This book provides a comprehensive analysis of Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration from 2011 to 2020. It raises the question of how this receiving state responded to the protracted refugee situation and asks: what are the implications of its responses, and how do they change? We refer to a "refugee situation" as one in which there is a context of conflict-induced forced migration, including people displaced by crossing the national borders of their origin country without those individuals being able to claim or acquire official refugee status due to the regulations of the host country, as in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan and many other refugee-hosting countries in the Global South.

In order to respond to the above questions regarding the receiving state's response to refugee situations, the book focuses on policies and discourses developed during the reception, protection, and integration phases of accommodating refugees, and it focuses on continuities, ruptures, and changes. One goal of the book is to identify interactions and differences in responses across scales -transnational, national, local, individual-; in other words, to examine how policies are translated into local contexts, then how they are felt and experienced by refugees and how refugees claim agency and develop belonging. We look for the ordering principles or mediating factors in the structuring of multilevel responses of various actors and shifts in responses over time.

As an analytical starting point to define a state's response to refugee situations and this response's outcome, we suggest a novel abstract concept: *strategic temporality*. We find strategic temporality to be a useful concept to explain the complexity of policies, practices, and experiences in governing refugee situations. Temporality is a governance strategy that is intentionally produced to control and manage refugee situations. It has institutional, legislative and discursive components that all shape policy instruments addressing displaced people. Temporality also helps to describe asylum seekers' experience of "being between" and their encounters with locals and the state actors in the host country. We also see temporality in the interventions of local actors. We argue that strategic temporality shapes central state actors' treatment of the three policy fields of protracted refugee response: reception, protection and integration. Non-state actors, including refugees, international, national, and local actors- navigate and negotiate this temporality. The simultaneous charting of different scales of the migration governance system tells an expansive story of migrant journeys towards full participation in their host societies, constrained by strategic temporality. To better understand experiences at the different scales and accordingly to further elaborate strategic temporality, we introduce three key supporting concepts: liminality, uncertainty and complexity. Liminality refers to the experience of finding oneself temporally or spatially in-between positions. By uncertainty, we mean that actors lack comprehensive knowledge and predictability about the future of the refugee situation. These actors include both policy makers and implementors as well as civil society members, host communities and displaced people themselves. Complexity refers to the complicated legal and institutional

arrangements that emerge in response to the refugee situation on the one hand and to entanglements of issue areas (e.g. security, economy, societal dynamics) influencing the policy and politics on the other hand. There is no hierarchy among these supporting concepts. However, liminality is more helpful in explaining the situation experienced by refugees, while complexity and uncertainty are useful for understanding the dynamics embedded in the structure. Four more concepts: multilevelness, stratification, local turn and agency are discussed in detail below as further ways to specific the governance system and the multifaceted responses on the part of actors to strategic temporality.

Positing strategic temporality as the key encompassing characteristic of Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration enables us to bring more than a few theories and arguments about refugee responses together, including multilevel governance, bordering, assemblage theory, governmentality, ethnography of migration, politics of migration and agent-based theories. This book is particularly engaged with multilevel governance theory, which describes institutions and their relations across levels of policy. We argue that multilevel governance with a "centralist mode" and a "local turn" fit our case, and these features are driven by this strategic temporality. This research further develops the multilevel governance framework by zooming in on interactions between institutions and legal and discursive structures. Moreover, strategic temporality helps us to explain transformations over time observed in these components.

This book challenges the approach of taking refugee policies as a unitary field and suggests unpacking the refugee response by dividing it into reception, protection and integration policy fields. Strategic temporality is reflected in all three areas of governance, from the initial stage to changes in policies over time. In the case of Turkey, reception is temporal in being mainly ad hoc in practice and discourse via the idea of guesthood, hospitality and cultural intimacy. The temporality of protection is explicit, reflected through the adoption of temporary protection status in legislation and co-constitutive practices causing legal precarity and stratification. Integration also shows strategic temporality in its uncertainty and ambiguous fluctuation along an integration-(dis)integration/exclusion spectrum over time.

Given that we understand Turkey's response to Syrian refugee migration through the lens of strategic temporality, an important question is: who or what makes this temporality strategic? Turkey's response is multilevel, with a centralist government and state institutions dominating the field but cooperating with non-state and local actors to get support. These institutions undoubtedly have political interests linked to the refugee issue, such as regional or international concerns in security, political economy and foreign policy, and public policy and service provision. Thus, they act strategically as part of the state's refugee response legitimized within hospitality and guesthood discourses that are embeded temporally. However, institutions are not the sole actors, with local level actors, including refugees themselves demonstrating significant agency. Even non-state actors negotiate this strategic temporality with centralist institutions and thereby open space for themselves to act through subsidiarity. Refugees navigate this strategic temporality to claim belonging and to

develop coping mechanisms for survival, and they often feel partially included despite broader conditions of precarity and uncertainty.

The following section explains the concepts used to describe refugee response mechanisms, starting with our key concept, strategic temporality. Then, we describe our understanding of governance and how we conceive strategic temporality as a governance strategy. We also explore how our sub-concepts of liminality and uncertainty are part of strategic temporality and how strategic temporality as a concept addresses common findings in the broader field migration studies. The section that follows is a discussion of complementary sub-themes, such as multi-level governance, the local turn and subsidiarity, which will help us to address the main features of governance from an institutional perspective. Here, we address three dimensions of governance, namely institutional, legal, and discursive. We show that the concepts of stratification and differentiation contribute to expanding the scope of analysis by bringing in social and legal lenses. Next, we will visit the concepts of guesthood and hospitality to explore the discursive dimension of strategic temporality. The final section of the chapter describes the role of the refugee agency within this analytical framework.

1.2 Theoretical Framework: 'Strategic Temporality' in Governing Mass Migration

Migration studies increasingly focus on time and temporality to understand displacement experiences and the governing of the displacement (Brun, 2016; Baas & Yeoh, 2019). Time is becoming a more common theoretical lens for illuminating different migration profiles (Krasteva, 2021). Arguably, temporality is a key feature of the asylum-seeking and refugee experience. A number of studies point out temporality's salience in defining contemporary migration and asylum regimes (Biehl, 2015; Horst & Grabska, 2015; Nassar & Stel, 2019, 2020; Pascucci, 2016). Temporality emerges as a vital element in governing asylum at borders, refugee camps, reception centres, detention units or urban spaces in Europe, Americas and elsewhere (Andersson, 2014; El Shaarawi, 2015; Griffiths, 2014). Linking temporality with the concept of governance, we approach temporality as a strategy that is intentionally produced to control and manage displaced people by governing actors. Regarding refugees' experience, temporality also tells us about how asylum seekers go through the experience of being in-between. In our understanding, temporality goes along with and is used synonymously with other concepts common in migration studies, such as uncertainty and ambiguity, or most importantly, liminality.

Originating in anthropological studies and broadly applied in the social and political sciences, liminality refers to the "experience of finding oneself at a boundary or in an in-between position, either temporally or spatially" (Thomassen, 2015, 40). As Turner (1969) described it, liminality is a transitional space in ritual from one status or stage of life to another. The liminal state can be one of violence,