Chapter 3
Reception



3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, we describe the strategic temporality embedded in the Turkish reception system for Syrian refugees. First, we focus on the effect of laws and how they lead to nuances in multilevel governance on the ground where a local turn is observable, and a politics of subsidiarity is created. We discuss the discursive dimension of reception governance, which centres on cultural intimacy and guesthood rhetorics. These narratives reflect the strategic approach of policymakers who consistently underline that migrants' reception is a temporal phenomenon. The chapter provides a multi-layered emphasis on discourses and practices that show how the reception is a policy field where strategic temporality is a dominant mode.

Turkey's reception system shows traces of subsidiarity politics, which ensures that the central state delegates tasks among different actors both vertically and also horizontally. The principle of subsidiarity requires multilevel governance in devolving decision-making to the lowest capable level for achieving the tasks required in order to better engage local bodies, individual actors, relevant NGOs, and faith-based institutions, but also to preserve strong roles for governments in providing direction, standards, guidelines, incentives and sanctions. This system bears the logic of multilevel governance, originally defined as the dispersion of authority away from central government – upwards to the supranational level, downwards to subnational jurisdictions, and sideways to public-private networks (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Despite its selective subsidiarity, the Turkish state also shows the characteristics of a state-centric model of reception.

The multilevel governance of the reception system in Turkey has evolved in parallel with the deployment of the political discourse of cultural intimacy based on the rhetorics of guesthood, Ansar spirit and religious brotherhood displayed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) Government (hereafter the Government) (Rottmann & Kaya, 2021). As will be discussed below in more detail, this culturalist and Islamic manner of reception of Syrian refugees by the Government was also

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shared by most of the Turkish population in the first years of mass migration. Syrians also embraced this approach. However, after 10 years of mass migration of Syrians, the political discourse of cultural intimacy is no longer socially reciprocated by most Turkish citizens. The discourse of return has become more widespread since 2018 as hostility against Syrians escalated due to increasing socio-economic and political unrest. This discursive shift has also become visible in the speeches of state actors, who are often underlining the temporary character of the Syrians' stay in Turkey. However, the culturalist discourse is still intact for most Syrian migrants. The interview data collected for this book reveal that the main source of comfort for the Syrians in Turkey is a set of ethnocultural, religious, and historical ties between most Syrians and native Turkish citizens.

This Chapter is composed of two main parts. The first part explores the strategic temporality of reception directly drawing from extensive desk research about relevant secondary literature on reception policies, laws and discourses in Turkey, legal documents, policy documents, officials' speeches and archival resources. The second part benefits from structured interviews with Syrian migrants under temporary protection in İstanbul, İzmir and Şanlıurfa to understand how refugees perceive reception policies, regulations, and practices. The second part will also discuss the findings driven from the semi-structured interviews with politicians, administrators, and implementers concerned with different dimensions of reception, such as education, labour market, housing, allowances, health services, and social services. The analysis of rich material confirms that reception is envisioned not as a temporary period for a migrant, but it is actually defined as permanent temporariness. The entire framework, with its legal, discursive and practical features, institutionalises strategic temporality.

3.2 The Formulation of Temporary Protection Policy

The first group of Syrian nationals found refuge in Turkey by crossing into the province of Hatay on 29 April 2011. Initially, the Government expected that the Assad regime would soon collapse, and it estimated that, at most, around 100,000 Syrians would stay in Turkey for 2–3 weeks (Erdoğan, 2014). Following the escalation of armed conflict in Syria, the Government declared an open-door policy for the Syrian refugees in October 2011. Accordingly, Turkey has allowed Syrians with passports to enter the country freely and treated those who may have entered without documents in a similar way; it has guaranteed the principle of non-refoulment, offered temporary protection and committed itself to providing the best possible living conditions and humanitarian assistance for the refugees (İçduygu, 2015a; Kirişçi, 2014). Meanwhile, a discursive component of reception started to become more apparent. State actors framed Syrians as guests. This political discursive frame was later complemented with the religiously-loaded discourse of *Ansar* spirit.

In a short time, the Turkish Government codified its Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) in 2014, echoing the EU's Directive (TPR, 2014). The directive

grants Syrians almost the entire spectrum of refugees' social and civil rights in western societies. Since then, the number of Syrians has increased, while their statutes have varied, as presented in the table and elaborated further below (Table 3.1).

As of 2 September 2021, Turkey's Temporary Protection regime granted 3,707,564 Syrian nationals the right to legally stay in Turkey and some level of access to fundamental rights and services. There are also other Syrians in Turkey who were granted citizenship and residence permits. However, the temporary protection regulation blocks the path to citizenship and access to the application for individual international protection (except for circumstances called exceptional citizenship, noted in Chaps. 2 and 4).

3.3 Material Reception Conditions and Practices

While Turkey's asylum law, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), does not employ the term "reception conditions" as such, Articles 88 and 89 of the LFIP commit to a set of rights, entitlements and benefits for international protection applicants, which fall within the scope of the EU Reception Conditions Directive.

The first 4 years following the reception of Syrians can be considered the first period in which both authorities and the Syrians themselves regarded the crisis as a rather short-term problem. In this period, meeting the temporary needs of refugees, such as accommodation, nutrition, and access to health services, was prioritized and perceived to be more important than planning for their future. The second period includes the years after the first 4 years. In this period, due to the anticipation that the crisis would not be resolved shortly, there was mobility from the border cities towards the big cities in the western parts of the country, which had more employment opportunities. The Syrian population that used to live around the border towns and in South-eastern Anatolia migrated to industrialised cities where the labour market is more active. Today, İstanbul alone hosts around five hundred thousand Syrians, Bursa around two hundred thousand, and İzmir around one hundred fifty thousand (DGMM, 2021). The focal points of this second period have been Syrians' participation in education in higher numbers, meeting the special needs of women and children (addressing the problems of child marriage and child labour) and confronting problems faced by people with chronic diseases, the disabled, the elderly and others with special needs. Protection has come more to the forefront during this period, and the actors have focused more on the aforementioned issues.

In this section, a detailed analysis of the existing forms of such reception conditions, services, programs and schemes will be discussed in light of the findings of our fieldwork. Specifically, we focus on experiences in accommodation and housing, financial allowances, access to the labour market, education and health care services in the early periods of arrival.

Table 3.1 Changing Number of Syrian refugees in major cities between November 2014, 21 July 2017, 12 August 2019, and September 2021

City	November 2014	July 2017	August 2019	September 2021	City	November 2014	July 2017	August 2019	September 2021
İstanbul	330.000	495.027	547.943	532.153	Batman	20.000	20.181	22.392	15.702
Gaziantep	220.000	336.929	445.748	457.183	Şırnak	19.000	15.080	15.019	14.993
Hatay	190.000	397.047	432.436	436.951	Kocaeli	15.000	34.957	57.745	55.906
Şanlıurfa	170.000	433.856	429.735	424.827	İzmir	13.000	113.460	145.123	149.273
Mardin	70.000	96.062	87.507	90.076	Osmaniye	12.000	46.157	50.295	46.430
Adana	50.000	165.818	240.376	254.036	Antalya	10.000	458	1.786	3.552
Kilis	49.000	127.175	116.317	106.026	Kayseri	9.500	62.645	79.161	81.338
Mersin	45.000	153.976	201.887	233.520	Diyarbakır	5.000	30.405	33.245	24.010
Konya	45.000	79.139	108.419	121.444	Adıyaman	2.500	27.084	25.549	22.610
Kahramanmaraş	44.000	93.408	90.073	94.879	Samsun	1.230	4.540	5.852	8.320
Ankara	30.000	80.279	93.120	102.199	Niğde	1.100	3.848	4.674	6.446
Bursa	20.000	114.498	174.865		Aydın	1.000	8.806	7.922	

Source: DGMM (2021)

3.3.1 Accommodation and Housing

The term 'housing' refers to accommodation and a means of subsistence in the receiving country for first arrivals, food/water and coal or wood for heating purposes. There have been three different forms of housing for Syrian refugees since 2011: temporary accommodation centres, private housing, and informal settlements (such as staying with friends, in squats, and makeshift). In the very beginning, Syrians were accommodated in the 22 temporary accommodation centres (camps) located at the Syrian border. For a long time, the international community and national governments have favoured the camp model based on political calculation. However, Turkey showed only short-term interest in having refugee camps. Since the beginning of the mass migration, an overwhelming majority of Syrians have stayed in private housing, while a small proportion of them stayed in informal settlements.

Institutionally, Temporary Accommodation Centres were first run by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), which was established in 2009 under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office. Responsibility for AFAD's management was then transferred to the auspices of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in 2018. When AFAD was transferred to the MoI, its mandate on the temporary accommodation centres was transmitted to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), which is also operating under the same ministry. Temporary Accommodation Centres are now only available in seven places located in five cities: Adana (1), Hatay (2), Kahramanmaraş (3), Kilis (4), and Osmaniye (5). A total of 22 camps were used to host over 217,000 Syrian refugees up until early 2018. Those who were accommodated in the camps constituted only 5% of around 4 million Syrians under temporary protection. The camps started to be closed in 2018 based on a government decision. People staying there were given the option of either moving to cities for self-settlement or returning to Syria. They were also offered a small amount of cash assistance (Şahin Mencütek, 2021). The number of Syrian refugees in the Temporary Accommodation Centres was only 139,150 persons as of 11 April 2019 and 53,130 persons as of 2 September 2021 (see DGMM website). Camps offered power, hot water, schools, playgrounds, and job training courses to the migrants. Turkey's camps were even praised by international media as the "perfect refugee camps" (BBC, 2012). Major humanitarian organisations, from the Red Cross to UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and many smaller NGOs, worked to supply the camps and other settlements with the basics: housing, food, water, clothing and hygiene items. The camps were in good condition, both in infrastructure and their ability to meet basic needs. They offered kindergartens and schooling facilities from primary degree to high school, courses for vocational training, language courses (mainly in Turkish), internet rooms, grocery stores and markets, and health centres and post offices.

Irrespective of the conditions within camps, however, more than 95% of refugees in Turkey have chosen self-settlement from the beginning, mainly in urban areas, rejecting the camp option. Nearly 3.5 million are spread across the nation living in

conditions varying from group homes to informal camps in rural settings. Affordable and quality accommodation outside camps for Syrian refugees is one of the most critical challenges, given that now almost all Syrians under temporary protection have become urban refugees (Balkan et al., 2018). Housing issues add to refugees' feelings of being liminal and are discussed in detail in Chaps. 4 and 5.

In addition to Syrian refugees, Turkey has also seen an unprecedented number of asylum applications from Afghans, Iraqis, and Iranians in recent years. On paper, article 95-2 authorised the DGMM to set up "Reception and Accommodation Centres" for the accommodation, nutrition, healthcare, social and other needs of international protection applicants and status holders. There are seven Reception and Accommodation Centres in operation, located in the following cities: Erzurum, Gaziantep, İzmir, Kırklareli, Kayseri, Van and Yozgat. Non-Syrians also suffer from housing problems encountered by Syrians. Like Syrians, non-Syrians are also governed with a rationale of strategic temporality, which has kept material reception conditions minimal.

3.3.2 Access to Livelihoods

A significant challenge at the reception stage is the provision of financial aid to displaced people as a livelihood source, considering that the majority live in urban spaces. In Turkey, two main financial allowances are available to Syrians, including the Emergency Social Safety Net Program (ESSN) and the Conditional Educational Assistance to Foreigners (CCET). International protection applicants, who are also registered with UNHCR-Turkey since 2018, are rarely granted the right to seek financial assistance from UNHCR. Although financial assistance is aimed at supporting the initial needs of refugees at the reception stage, in Turkey, the support has been long-lasting as part of the logic of strategic temporality of hosting.

Institutionally speaking, the financial allowance is the issue area that manifests how multilevel governance works on the ground. The European Commission introduced the ESSN following the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement of 18 March 2016 (European Council, 2016). The ESSN programme aims to help the most vulnerable of refugee families residing in Turkey. ESSN is put into practice through the EU's collaboration with the DGMM, Turkish Crescent, and Halkbank, a public bank. The scheme provides 1.5 million Syrians with an ESSN debit card, giving them access to a fixed amount of money every month. They can use the money to buy whatever they need most for their families: food, fuel, rent, medicine, and pay bills. Refugee families receive 150 Turkish Liras (currently about 15 euros) per family member under the condition that no family member works in any formal job and has at least three kids (ESSN, 2021). The ESSN program does not include those with formal work permits and those who were granted Turkish citizenship.

As the second financial allowance, the CCTE provides monthly cash assistance to Syrian primary and secondary school students. The CCTE aims to support the integration of refugee children into the national education system through a

financial incentive when the children attend classes regularly. The criteria for benefiting from this aid is to be a member of a needy family that does not have any social insurance. The assistance is conditional upon the regular attendance to school evidenced by the school administrators. The EU funds the program through the Humanitarian Implementation Plan. It is run by UNICEF, MoFLSS, the Turkish Red Crescent and the Ministry of Education. It has committed 34 million euros for 2016, 50 million euros for 2017, and 20 million euros for 2019 (European Commission, 2021).

Besides financial allowance, in-kind assistance is also an issue at the reception stage. Article 79-2 of the LFIP states that international protection applicants identified "to be in need" are granted access to social assistance and benefits dispensed by the provincial governorates, which dispense social assistance and benefits under this scheme by means of the Social Solidarity and Assistance Foundations. The Governorates provide in-kind assistance, such as coal and wood for heating purposes, food and hygiene items and financial assistance to "poor and needy residents" in the province, including foreign nationals. It is up to the provincial Social Solidarity and Assistance Foundation to determine whether applicants qualify for the "poor and needy" threshold.

The financial allowances are not adequate to meet the basic needs of many refugees (Barbelet & Wake, 2017). Food and rent constitute the largest portion of monthly expenditures by refugee families. In terms of food security, studies have reported consistent poor dietary diversity amongst the refugee population, and 24% of under 5 years old children suffer from chronic under-nutrition (MDMT, 2019; FAO, 2018; Kaya & Kıraç, 2016). NGOs told us that food vouchers supplied by the local authorities or aid agencies were their main sources of income. Research reveals that some families sell their food aid or vouchers in exchange for cash (Kaya & Kıraç, 2016). The average monthly expenditure of a Syrian refugee family is much less than the poverty threshold of a Turkish family with four members (Ibid.). Using the World Food Programme's standard (0–21 Poor; 21.5–35 Borderline; >35 Acceptable) as the thresholds for the Food Consumption Score, Kaya and Kıraç (2016) found that 12% of the refugee population in İstanbul did not have an adequate diet and can be considered food insecure. Around 15% of refugee households are borderline, meaning that these people are also considered at-risk in terms of food security (Ibid.).

For families with low Food Consumption Score, food support coming from the municipalities, various foundations, or NGOs has been essential since the very beginning of their reception to Turkey. During our interviews, a 50-year-old man married with ten children residing in a Temporary Accommodation Centre in Şanlıurfa expressed his appreciation with regard to the food boxes coming to his house regularly. He said: "*Sosyal Yardımlaşma Vakfı* [Social Assistance Foundation] brings some aid, such as food boxes, meat, clothing etc. Five of my kids go to school, and they are given aid for attendance. We follow up all aids, as we like having children a lot, and we have many kids; hence we need support in feeding them" (Interview_Şanlıurfa_23 July 2018_SRII).

Our interlocutors mostly state that they get food boxes from local sources, such as municipalities and NGOs. A 41-year-old female married with four children in İstanbul said the following when asked about food supplies:

> I was feeling embarrassed to ask for help, but they insisted and brought me a lot of furniture. Also, they were giving me food continuously until I got the *Kimlik* [Temporary Protection Identity Card]; for about 10 months, I lived with the help of people (at that time, my husband was still with me). After that, when I got *Kimlik*, they told us to register in the *Belediye* [Municipality] to get help. We registered, and they gave us 400 TL and a carton of food. Then the number of people started to increase, and the support decreased (Interview_İstanbul_19 July 2018_OzU).

One of our interlocutors in İstanbul responded to our question about access to food and hygiene with a very critical gaze. A 29-year-old female student who is trying to complete her engineering degree, which was interrupted because of the war in Syria, criticised the way the international community treats Syrian refugees:

> We do not want food support from the UN, and we do not want to be given a salary. We want them to consider us as normal people, not to make us like the Palestinians. We can't enter most countries. This is the most important thing, to be like a normal person. I think the organisations are not searching for a solution, they only give a glass or cup or some food, but we don't want that. There is a lot of food in Syria. We want them to respect us, treat us as normal people, give us our rights, and have the right to travel to other countries, even Arab countries. If the UN wants, they can tell Jordan, for example, to open the border, and they will open it immediately, but they don't want a solution. We live a good life for the Syrians outside Syria, but the people inside are suffering (Interview_İstanbul_2 July 2018_OzU).

Such critical voices against the international community were rather limited, as seen in previous interviews. Also, some other interlocutors expressed their appreciation for being in Turkey and away from Syria, which did not offer any prospects for their children, even in times of tranquillity. A 40-year-old man married with three children said the following when asked about the living conditions in İstanbul:

> I am living here better than I was in Syria. I am living in luxury more than in Syria. In Syria, I was taking in 15,000 in a month, and it wasn't enough. I had to pay 5000 for house rent, and I lived on 10,000. It was always 'cleaned out' [I spent all that I got]. If I wanted to buy something for my children, I couldn't. Here, the salary is good, and there is support, so I am living well. In Antakya, I was taking a lot of support cards, a German card, and a food card. I got 300 or 400 TL to buy everything (Interview_İstanbul_31 July 2018_OzU)

Refugees that we interviewed resorted to several different coping strategies as far as socio-economic constraints were concerned. The most frequently observed coping strategy for families is to rely on less preferred and less expensive food items. At the same time, some reduced the number of meals eaten per day, some borrowed food from others or relied on help from others, and some reported reducing the portion size of meals. Some restricted consumption by adults in order to feed infants and young children, and some resorted to sending family members elsewhere to eat.

Non-food item needs also remain substantial amongst Syrian refugees, especially for those living in rural areas. Needs range across sectors, from bedding supplies, such as blankets, mattresses, clothing, kitchen equipment, and heating systems

(fuel and heaters/stoves). Households' depleted resources and inability to access and afford such items due to their high cost, lack of humanitarian support and distance to local markets were the most cited challenges in accessing non-food items. Yet, findings show geographical variations, and while poverty cuts across locations, refugees in rural areas also tend to face higher physical constraints such as distance to markets selling non-food items or non-food items not being available in their local markets (MDMT, 2019).

Refugees with very poor conditions move frequently or stay with acquaintances or family, or in some cases, groups of single men live together. Refugees in the survival category relied on short-term strategies designed to reduce their living costs and provide them with immediate cash. Upon arrival in Turkey, these refugees often shared crowded accommodations and lived at their workplaces or makeshift places. With no savings or direct support through existing networks of friends or family, daily labour was their main source of income.

During the fieldwork, most of our interlocutors expressed concern about the dire conditions in which they had to live. One of our interlocutors, a 60-year-old Kurdish man married with four kids from Damascus living in Kasımpaşa, İstanbul, explained how he was mistreated ever since he came to Turkey:

> We came to Turkey and stayed for two or three months in Mardin. The life, I told you, was below zero. And one like you, told me why wouldn't you go to İstanbul? You have children. I told him I didn't have money, and he said, "If I found you a workshop for jackets would you go?" I told him yes. He called, and the owner of the workshop brought us here. For two years, we have been working, but we couldn't pay for rent from the salary as it was not enough. We paid for the car from there to here. And no one here is helping us, my brother. No one here is helping. I went to *Kızılay,* and they didn't help me. I went to the organisations in Fatih there are organisations, I went to them, and they didn't help me (Interview_İstanbul_25 July 2018_Bilgi).

However, some others did not experience such dire conditions. A 23-year-old woman married with two children from Aleppo, who stayed in Hatay for the first 3 years and then moved to Yedikule, İstanbul, explained how they were lucky now, thanks to an NGO, called Qnushyo[1]:

> Here they helped us a lot, in the centre here, the Qnushyo, they helped us with putting the girl in school. She's in kindergarten, and they paid the money, whatever was requested, whatever the school requested they, -I swear- they facilitated all the documents, we just took the kids to the first day at school (Interview_İstanbul_27 July 2018_Bilgi).

The testimonies of our interlocutors change from city to city. For instance, one of our interlocutors explained a sad experience on public transportation during which she was asked about the subsistence of her family. She was a 60-year-old woman with her three children (two married and one single) from Humus living in İzmir:

> Once, I got on a bus, and the ticket card did not work properly; a Turkish woman started to scream at me, saying that "you have a lot of money, the state gives you tons of money, you get on buses". And then they got me out of the bus, and they did not allow me to stay on the

[1] For further information about Qnushyo see http://qnushyo.com/ It was RESPOND Project's Advice Hub in İstanbul from 2018 to 2020.

> bus as my ticket did not work". But this is not true. We did not receive any aid from the state, I do not understand why do they treat us like that, I got upset a lot. Why do they treat us in this way, Erdoğan called us, he accepted us. Why do people treat us like that? We do not receive any money (Interview_İzmir_5 August 2018_ SRII).

The interviews that we conducted mainly show that the cash given to more than a million Syrian refugees under temporary protection makes a very big difference in their everyday lives and the ability to pay for bills, rent, and food. Similarly, NGOs' help also contributes to their survival by providing them with basic needs. As described, the central state delegates the tasks of financial assistance among different actors; it outsources this service to international actors and non-governmental organisations, which is a form of subsidiarity. Notably, the aid is neither guaranteed nor permanent. These organizations' stay in Turkey, and available funds are also unstable. All of our findings show how temporality governs refugee reception. As discussed in the section on Context in Chap. 2, negotiations for securing financial support from the EU are themselves a strategic process in which Turkish policymakers consistently underline the temporariness of hosting refugees.

3.3.3 Formal and Informal Pathways for Employment

In the early days of mass migration, Syrians used their existing informal labour networks widely, as those living in urban areas had to work to sustain themselves. Labour networks are widely applied in the process of migration in other national contexts as well. Not only do they help potential migrants obtain information about the availability of jobs, but they also help new migrants settle before starting a job. Even though using labour networks might be helpful, it should be highlighted that they cannot always be trusted. During the interviews, several Syrians stated that the jobs that were offered to them via labour networks turned out to have poor working conditions and low salaries that were often not paid on time and consistently.

At the heart of self-sufficiency is the ability of individuals to earn a living and provide for their families. Under temporary protection, refugees do not have the automatic right to work, and without the legal channels to access the labour market, the informal sector becomes the only option for individuals to earn a living. Anecdotal evidence points to a boom in the construction sector arising from the arrival of the refugees, particularly in the provinces bordering Syria, and that textiles and clothing manufacturing, agriculture and service sector were other major sectors of informal employment for refugees (Kaya & Kıraç, 2016; Erdoğan, 2014; Ferris & Kirişçi, 2016; Erzan et al., 2018). Wages for Syrians are generally reported to be only half of the minimum legal salary, and some participants reported making as little as 30 TL a day (around 2–3 dollars). It should be mentioned, of course, that none of these jobs provides job security, occupational safety, or social security benefits.

At the beginning of the mass migration, the neighbouring cities at the Syrian border (Kilis, Hatay, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep) were affected the most. As these cities mostly have agricultural fields to accommodate their own inhabitants, Syrians also tried to find job opportunities in the agricultural sector. Initially, there were only international organisations and local ethnocultural kinship networks which helped the Syrians find jobs. Some of the migrants also volunteered to contribute to the well-being of their compatriots by working as teachers, doctors, dentists, etc. The local communities also needed such help as the central state did not offer any financial help to those municipalities in parallel with the increasing number of inhabitants of the border cities. A 46-year-old male teacher in Şanlıurfa expressed his experience with the following words:

> When Syrian teachers first came here, they were accepted as volunteers, and they could work in district education centres with their diplomas. There were those who abused it, those who issued false diplomas, and so those who deserved to work as teachers were not recruited afterwards. There were also some other problems, such as the assignment of unqualified ones. In this sense, we cannot criticise the Turkish Government. On the contrary, they have always been very empathetic to our conditions from the beginning. But right now, temporary education centres are closed, and some Syrian teachers are transferred to public schools. Their work contracts are temporal and they are paid by the EU and UNICEF (Interview_Şanlıurfa_19 July 2018_SRII).

Syrians who found refuge in the border cities were mostly hosted by their relatives and friends in the first years of their exodus. Traditional kinship networks helped them struggle against the difficulties of everyday life, including finding a job. Other than that, international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR also helped Syrians obtain the right qualification to find jobs. Having graduated from a medical faculty in Damascus and now working as an Imam, a 36-year-old man married with three children from Damascus living in Şanlıurfa said the following to explain the support of international organisations:

> Upon arrival, some of us first worked at the temporary training centre, where we learned to do things. We were also paid to attend these training. The project did not last long. We continued until UNICEF came. I am now currently teaching at a school to teach religion to students. I also work in the temporary education Centre [GEM] to teach Syrian students (Interview_Şanlıurfa_19 July 2018_SRII).

In metropolitan cities such as İstanbul and İzmir, Syrian migrants did not find jobs. Those with kinship networks preferred to rely on their kin, but those without any network mostly found underpaid jobs in the informal markets in the textile, construction, service and agriculture sectors. A 48-year-old man married with four children expressed the difficulties of finding a job when he first came to İzmir: In the beginning, we did not find any job, we did some textile jobs at home, but they were paying very little, or they escaped without paying at all, we did not have any money, any bread to eat really (Interview_İzmir_17 August 2018_SRII).

Some have argued that there is an urgent need for better and innovative policies to facilitate the integration of Syrians into the Turkish labour market, considering the country's economic needs as well (Erdoğan et al., 2021). Multiple benefits can emerge from providing a dignified life for Syrians.

3.3.4 Education and Health Care Services

Turkey recognises the right of all children in Turkey to receive an education. For Turkish nationals, enrolment in schooling is mandatory up to grade 12. Currently, 95% of school-aged children are enrolled in primary education, while 86% are enrolled in secondary education (MEB, 2018). In the case of Syrian children, the Turkish state has given a strong message in favour of education and centralised accountability at the highest levels. During consultations with the Ministry of National Education members during the field research, the local representatives repeatedly emphasised that they see education for Syrians as an opportunity for a brighter future and the ability to contribute to rebuilding Syria. This is also a position that is often reiterated by the officers of the DGMM (Jalbout, 2015). In the meantime, their massive migration to Turkey offers them a safer, more comfortable, and more productive experience during their stay, allowing them to become independent and more engaged members of their host communities. This policy stance was reflected in the Ministry of National Education's Circular 2014/21 on Foreigners' Access to Education, which has eased the administrative barriers for Syrian children to enrol in public schools.

The Ministry of National Education Circular 2014/21 on "Education Services for Foreign Nationals" of 23 September 2014 introduced the concept of Temporary Education Centre (*Geçici Eğitim Merkezi*, GEM). It provided a legal framework for the supervision and monitoring of private schools run by Syrian charities, which had existed outside the regulatory framework of the Ministry of National Education (MoNA) and were therefore unlawful but tolerated by provincial authorities. GEM is specifically defined as schools established and run to provide educational services to persons arriving in Turkey for a temporary period as part of mass migration.

The MoNA authorities have stated that the children accommodated in the camps have unimpeded and virtually full access to primary education, mainly at GEM administered inside the camps. On the other hand, children of school age outside the camps can either attend a public school in the locality, which teaches the Turkish school curriculum and instruct in Turkish, or a GEM. Alternatively, they were also some private Syrian schools for a while, but they are generally not free, and some do not have diploma recognition. They charge students varying amounts of fees. It remains unclear what legal validity any diplomas or certificates issued by the temporary education centres will have going forward. At the same time, the Provincial Directorate of MoNA authorities is authorised to determine such questions if and where the child is subsequently admitted to a public school or a university in Turkey. Another challenge concerns the quality of education provided in GEM, since Syrian teachers teach courses, often volunteers, who need remuneration and professionalisation, according to the interviewed bureaucrats working for the Ministry.

The MoNA has been on the way to a gradual phasing out of the GEM. From September 2016 onwards, all Syrian children entering kindergarten or first grade have to be enrolled in Turkish schools since it has been decided that the GEMs would be gradually closed down. The MoNA has also encouraged children entering

fifth and ninth grade to register at Turkish schools. According to the October 2021 figures of The General Directorate of Life-Long Learning's Migration and Disaster Unit, regarding the 5–17 age group, 731,713 Syrian children out of 1.2 million continue their education in Turkish schools.[2] The numbers are particularly high in Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adana and Kilis, which are the most densely populated by Syrian citizens and Syrian students.

During fieldwork, some of our interlocutors talked about the difficulties of adapting themselves and their children to the Turkish educational system. A 40-year-old man with three children from Aleppo residing in İstanbul in the summer of 2018 said the following when he was asked about his experiences regarding access to education:

> My daughters are in Temporary Syrian Schools [GEM]; at the beginning of this year, I wanted to transfer them to Turkish schools, but there was a problem. We transferred them to schools that were quite far away. And it's a problem, they're far, and if it doesn't work out, I'll have to send them with someone (Interview_İstanbul_31 July 2018_Bilgi).

Since the beginning of the mass migration, one of the most significant difficulties experienced by the Syrians is the problems they encounter in having their degrees, or formal educational levels, recognised by the Turkish state (Çelik & İçduygu, 2018). When asked whether he had difficulties in having access to education, a 21-year-old male from Damascus living in Sancaktepe, İstanbul, expressed his feelings as such:

> School – it was not easy to complete my studies here. In Syria, I finished 8th grade. When I came here, I registered in a Syrian school; when I finished the 9th grade, I discovered that the school was not accepted by the Turkish Government. The Turkish schools wouldn't accept my certificate. I waited for some time until the school was accepted by the Government. This happened two years ago. I then went to the Turkish education ministry. They told me it was a fake certificate, and we couldn't accept it. I went then to the headmaster there and told him about my situation. He didn't accept it either. He said it was because it had only the school stamp, not the Ministry one. He said, 'we can't help you; we don't have a system that saves the names of students! I lost my future because of that (Interview_İstanbul_10 August 2018_OzU).

Syrians often talk about a lack of institutions teaching the Turkish language as one of their most serious difficulties in Turkey. In the early days of their reception, many were not offered any opportunity to learn Turkish through formal institutions because their stay was considered temporary. However, over time, various local institutions such as ISMEK (run by the Metropolitan Municipality of İstanbul), *Halk Eğitim Merkezleri* (Public Education Centres operating under the MoNA), TÖMER (a public institution teaching Turkish as a foreign language)[3] and the Association of Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants (ASAM),[4] a

[2] For further information for schooling rates of Syrians as of October 2021 see https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2021_11/05171729_ekim3.pdf

[3] For further information for TÖMER see TOMER, http://tomer.ankara.edu.tr/en/home-page/

[4] For further information for ASAM see http://en.sgdd.info/

nation-wide NGO, started to introduce Turkish language courses for foreigners and individuals under temporary protection.

Healthcare services also fall under reception conditions. Article 89-3 of the LFIP states that applicants who do not have any health insurance coverage and who do not have the financial means to pay for healthcare services are to be covered by the General Health Insurance Scheme (GHIS) under Turkey's public social security scheme and financed by the DGMM. Beneficiaries need to be assigned a Foreigners ID Number as a prerequisite for coverage by the GHIS; applicants processed under the accelerated procedure cannot have access to this benefit since they are not issued the International Protection Applicant Identification Document (IPID). As defined by Turkish healthcare legislation, applicants who are not processed under the regular procedure only have access to urgent and basic healthcare services.

Syrian refugees are impacted significantly by difficulties in registration, as it affects their access to healthcare services. Many interlocutors during the field research reported that there is a lack of healthcare facilities providing Arabic-speaking staff and doctors, and they attributed this as a major concern and barrier for the access of Syrians to essential services. Due to the size of big cities such as İstanbul and İzmir, local transportation is also reported to be another significant barrier in terms of access to services.

All Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey are eligible to receive the same healthcare as Turkish citizens, being covered by the national health insurance scheme. Emergency medical services are also provided to non-registered persons. Syrians have the right to access free-of-charge health care services provided by public health institutions for both primary and secondary care. A subsidy of 80% applies to medication costs, which used to be covered by AFAD, and is now by DGMM (since March 2018). Besides primary health care services and public hospitals, Syrians can also approach one of the many Migrant Health Centres (MHC) located in the provinces with high refugee population density. These centres are staffed by both Syrian doctors and nurses and bilingual (Turkish-Arabic) Turkish medical staff. As of May 2018, 1.515 medical staff (75% being Syrian refugees, 16% Turkish citizen Syrians) are delivering primary health care services in 169 Migrant Health Centres supported by the project. Syrians under temporary protection can also benefit from mental health services provided by public health care institutions. In most health care facilities, interpreters are not available, rendering communication with health care providers challenging since the beginning of the mass migration (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). Some NGOs, including the Turkish Red Crescent (KIZILAY) and ASAM are trying to bridge this gap. A 37-year-old man married with four children said the following when asked about his access to health services:

> The area [I live in] has everything, but there is a healthcare centre in the same neighbourhood. They don't receive us, the Syrians, I don't know why. They tell us to go to Kasımpaşa [a district of İstanbul in The European continent], well I have the *kimlik* [temporary protection ID] and everything, and it is a healthcare centre, they should receive us. I called and complained against them. They said I should go to the directorate of migration [DGMM in İstanbul], so I called them. Nobody, I called this number 100 times and this Red Crescent

> number, and others, they advised me to go to the directorate of migration, and I would have to go and come. No. I don't want to be silent. If I see something wrong, I have to speak up, and if it is here or anywhere else, I have to speak up (Interview_İstanbul_1 August 2018_Bilgi).

The language barrier has always been a challenge in the healthcare field since the reception of Syrians. Though it was reported to be less of a problem in the cities at the Syrian border, where Arabic was one of the commonly spoken languages during the early years of mass migration, it became a more significant issue after Syrians started to migrate to the bigger cities in the country. One of our interlocutors in Şanlıurfa confirmed this observation with her experience. The 60-year-old woman with a son, and divorced years ago in Syria, said the following when asked about access to health services: "Hospitals and health services here are very good here, all of them have translators. They give the medicines for free, and they do the treatment for free." (Interview_Şanlıurfa_12 July 2018_SRII).

Although healthcare services have been provided for free to all migrants under temporary protection since the beginning of their reception, the language problem remains a significant issue raised by Syrians.

3.3.5 Mobility and Travel

Mobility is a critical part of exercising one's rights. According to Article 43 of the TPR, migrants under temporary protection living outside the camps should apply to the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) in their provinces and request a travel permit. In some places, migrants under temporary protection have an obligation to make regular declarations to the relevant authorities by obtaining their signature/fingerprint. Those migrants who live in temporary accommodation centres (camps) are also required to obtain permission from the camp administration to travel to the province where they live. If they wish to travel to another city, they must obtain a travel permit from the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management as described above.

Security forces conduct their work under the coordination of the DGMM and make travel permit control checks for Syrians travelling to another city. Bus companies do not sell tickets to Syrians without a permit, and similar applications are being carried out at the airports. Those who pass through the search points and have permission to travel are allowed to do so. These efforts aim to register Syrians and make them stay in their residences in order for them to benefit from services. However, Syrians express their discontent about the legal barriers to their mobility. A 40-year-old woman married with six children from Daraa living in Sancaktepe said the following about the difficulties of getting travel permits:

> It is hard to meet a relative because of the travel permit, and it is difficult to take it. I visited my sister once, but before, a travel permit was required. When we went to bring the girl that my son chose [as a bride], we went to the government office to take a travel permit, and they

> asked a lot of questions such as why you want to go? How long will you stay? etc. We told them that we were going to bring a girl who would be the bride of my son, so they gave us a permit for ten days (Interview_İstanbul_16 July 2018_OzU).

When asked about their ability to travel in and outside of Turkey, a 23-year-old man married with two children living in Yedikule, İstanbul, said the following concerning his appreciation of the opportunity to go to Syria and come back:

> Everyone gives you a way, an idea. There are many people who advise us to go outside of Turkey, Germany, Sweden or such. But we liked to stay here, I have family in Syria, I mean here I am able to go to Syria and see my family every Eid [Islamic Holiday, "Bayram" in English it is also transliterated into Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha], in the Eid we travel, we see them and come back. My in-law's house is also the same. They live next to us; because of that, we did not like to travel outside of Turkey (Interview_İstanbul_27 July 2018_Bilgi).

Turkey has begun to have a public debate about whether or not the state should let those who want to visit their relatives in Syria back into Turkey after the religious holidays (Hürriyet Daily News, 2017). There is an increasing demand among the Syrians to visit their relatives to assuage feelings of longing for their homeland and to meet some subsistence needs. A 60-year-old divorced woman with a son in Şanlıurfa said the following: "We did not travel anywhere else beyond Urfa. I visited Syria three years ago, crossing from Akçakale border gate for festive time [Eid], and stayed there for 1.5 months. I went to ask money from my brother while returning I came through." Afrin (Interview_Şanlıurfa_17 July 2018_SRII).

Syrians try to find different coping strategies to overcome issues related to the difficulties of geographical mobility. Applying for Turkish citizenship is one of them. A 35-year-old married man with two children living in Şanlıurfa said the following:

> Yes, if I can take citizenship, I can work here. For example, right now, when I need something, I cannot go to Adana, İstanbul or go to the border to view our goods, or to talk with customers etc., but if I get citizenship, I can travel freely, do you understand that, if I can have a nationality, I can work freely, I can talk with people, government, I will not have any problem then (Interview_Şanlıurfa_11 July 2018_SRII).

It seems that geographical mobility for the Syrians under temporary protection will become more complicated as central state actors and the ruling party, the AKP, have become more repressive in keeping Syrians in the cities where they are initially registered, as mentioned in the opening vignette of this book.

3.4 Discursive Dimensions of Reception: Changes from Guesthood and Cultural Intimacy Framings to Social Tensions and Repatriation

The reception of Syrian refugees in Turkey is mainly based on a discourse of tolerance and benevolence driven from path-dependent ethnocultural and religious premises dating back to the Ottoman Empire of the late ninteenth century and the

establishment of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s. The vocabulary, which has been used to identify the Syrian refugees, represents a kind of continuity with regards to the naming of aliens entering the country legally and discursively identified as "migrants", "guests", and "foreigners" since the early days of the Republic. All these terms have strong ethnocultural and politico-religious connotations in Turkey.

The Law on Settlement (1934) is one of the foundational legal texts defining how the Turkish state has identified newcomers. The Law on Settlement was adopted in regard to the arrival of ethnic Turks in the early years of the Republic. Moreover, it continued to be the main legislative text dealing with immigration, and it determines who can enter, settle and/or apply for refugee status in Turkey. It also provides individuals of Turkish descent and culture with the opportunity to be accepted as "immigrants" and refugees in Turkey (İçduygu, 2015b). For instance, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Bulgarian-Muslims and Uighurs migrating to Turkey from different parts of the world are named "migrants" (*göçmen*) in the official documents as in everyday life as they are of Turkish descent ethnically. In this regard, there are two other terms that need to be elaborated further: guest (*misafir*) and foreigner (*yabancı*).

In the official literature, the term guest has been used to refer to refugees of Muslim origin but without Turkish ethnic origin from outside the European continent. Kurdish refugees in the 1990s–2000s and Syrian refugees in the 2010s were named as guests' since Turkey officially does not accept refugees from outside its western boundaries. Bosnian and Kosovar refugees seeking refuge in Turkey in the 1990s set up an exception as they were coming from the western borders of Turkey and had the right to apply for asylum in Turkey (Kirişçi & Karaca, 2015). On the other hand, the term "foreigner" is often used in official texts and in public to refer to those who are not Turkish or Muslim. These groups can also not be incorporated into the prescribed national identity, which is mainly based on what one might call the holy trinity of Sunni-Muslim-Turkish elements. Accordingly, not only the non-Muslims coming from abroad but also autochthonous groups such as Greeks and Armenians are named "foreigners" or "local foreigners" in legal texts (Çetin, 2002).

To this extent, a more recent metaphor to qualify the role that the Turkish state and the pious Muslim-Turks play for Syrians in Turkey, especially during the first years of the mass migration, has been the *Ansar spirit* (Arabic for "helpers"), a politico-religious discourse embraced by the AKP rule. As a metaphor, *Ansar* refers to the people of Medina who supported the Prophet Mohammad and the accompanying Muslims (*muhajirun*, or migrants) who migrated there from Mecca, which was under the control of the pagans. The metaphor of Ansar originally points to a temporary situation as the Muslims later returned to Mecca after their forces recaptured the city from the pagans (Haber7, 2014). Hence, the Turkish Government has used a kind of Islamic symbolism to legitimise its acts regarding the resolution of the Syrian refugee crisis, inspired by some "ideological-sectarian reasons" (Gümüş & Eroğlu, 2015). Turkish government leaders have consistently compared Turkey's role in assisting the Syrian refugees to the Ansar, referring to the Medinans who helped Muhammad and his entourage, linking it with foreign policy approaches around "strategic depthness" and humanitarian diplomacy (Davutoğlu, 2001, 2013a, b).

The Prime Minister at the time, Ahmet Davutoğlu, in his speech in Gaziantep, one of the most popular destinations for Syrian refugees at the Syrian border, publicly stated that the inhabitants of Gaziantep were from a city of Ansar: "Gazi[antep] is an Ansar city now. God, bless you all" (Akşam, 2014). Similarly, President Erdoğan used the same discourse in his speeches in 2014 and afterwards: "In our culture, in our civilisation, guest means to honour and blessing. You [Syrian guests] have granted us the honour of being *Ansar* and brought us joy and blessing. As of today, we have more than 1.5 million Syrian and Iraqi guests" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2014). The discourse has continued until recently, Deputy PM, Numan Kurtulmuş, referred to the same rhetoric when he introduced the right to work granted to the Syrian refugees under temporary protection:

> The reason why the Syrian refugees are now settled in our country is the hospitality and Ansar spirit that our nation has so far adhered to. There are other countries that cannot do anything when they encounter a few hundred thousand refugees. However, contrary to what the rich and prosperous countries could not do for the refugees, our country did its best for the refugees as a generous host, friend, brother and neighbour. (Yeni Asya, 2016)

The main common denominator for the ruling political elite is that the Syrian refugees were mostly portrayed and framed by means of an act of benevolence. Hence, the assistance of the state to refugees is accomplished based on charity rather than on universally recognised rights that are supposed to be granted to refugees fleeing their homelands. Such a religious-based discourse regarding the reception of Syrian refugees in Turkey has also been embraced by the bureaucrats working in the migration sector, as well as by some local municipalities and some civil society actors. The use of the discourse of Ansar spirit by the Government and the President also goes in parallel with the use of Islamist, neo-Ottomanist and populist rhetoric by the same political actors. Essentializing the Islamist and Ottoman heritage has made it easier to eliminate possible critics of the Turkish population that is large of Sunni-Muslim origin (Kaya, 2019). The Government strategically chose such appealing historic frames to appease the opposition and garner social support in receiving newcomers, particularly in border cities.

After a short time, it became clear that framing the refugees as guests was not sustainable in terms of accommodating their urgent needs and coming to terms with the increasing resentment among the local populations vis-à-vis the refugees. Following the implementation of the TPR, which still frames the refugees as temporary, some discursive shifts became apparent in the media concerning the state actors' changing position on the permanent character of at least some of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. These discursive shifts have so far mainly emphasised the permanent nature of the issue – the introduction of work permits in early 2016, the incorporation of pupils into public schools, creation of quotas for Syrian students in higher education institutions (all of which are discussed in the next chapter). Even though permanency was recognised, it was very limited and selective and still partial, leaving migrants in a liminal state, so to speak.

As strategically intended by politicians, the framing of the refugee reality by state actors as an act of benevolence and tolerance has also shaped public opinion.

Although it delayed the process, the framing did not prevent the exposure of some racist and xenophobic attitudes vis-a-vis the Arabs in general and Syrians in particular. The increasing economic and financial crisis in Turkey in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 created further societal and political divides and polarisation, which has led to the scapegoating of Syrian refugees by many native groups as well as to the birth of Arabophobia, the origins of which may go back to the World War I (Khoury, 1983). Therefore, via both the past experiences stored in the collective memory of Turkish citizens and current political discourses, the Turkish Government strategically underlines the temporariness of Syrians.

However, these frames were intensively used in the early years of reception, then were not voiced extensively later, clearly displaying their temporality in the socio-political context. After 10 years of mass migration of Syrians, the political discourse of guesthood is no longer socially reciprocated by the majority of Turkish citizens. Hence, there is a discrepancy between how Syrians and locals perceive what one may call cultural and/or religious intimacy. The picture in Turkey is no longer as serene as the Government depicted it in the early years of mass migration. There is also growing public and political attention to the eventual return of Syrians. The discourse of return has become more widespread since 2018 as hostility against Syrians escalated in Turkey due to increasing socio-economic and political unrest.

The discursive shift also became visible in the speeches of the Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu, who started to give detailed accounts of Syrian returnees in his monthly organised press conferences in 2018 and 2019 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2019a). The discursive shift of the Government became even sharper in the aftermath of the local elections held on 23 June 2019 when the ruling party lost metropolitan cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Antalya. As mentioned in the beginning, following the loss of elections in İstanbul, the governor of İstanbul announced that Syrians under temporary protection residing in İstanbul without proof of documents showing İstanbul as their city of registration would be deported to the cities where they were initially registered, or to Syria. These changes in policy practices show that what is happening to the Syrians is not only a discursive shift but also an actual transformation of policies and practices from guesthood to return (Gökalp-Aras & Şahin Mencütek, 2019). However, the repetition of the demand for returning Syrians has somehow been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Turkish host communities perceive that the massive increase in the number of refugees outside of camps and the lack of adequate assistance policies have aggravated a range of social problems. There is now a growing concern about underage Syrian girls being forced into marriage with Turkish men (Kaya, 2017a, b) and fears that a recent constitutional court ruling decriminalising religious weddings without civil marriage will lead to a spread of polygamy involving Syrian women and girls (Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015). There have also been reports of occasional violence between refugees and the local population (Şahin Mencütek, 2020a, b). In turn, this reinforces a growing public perception that Syrian refugees are associated with criminality, violence and corruption. It is not a surprise that Turkish society has witnessed several lynching attempts, and the prevalence of stereotypes, prejudices, communal conflicts and other forms of harassment against Syrians is increasing

(Gökay, 2015). These attitudes contrast with the observations of local authorities and security officials that criminality is surprisingly low among refugees and that Syrian community leaders are very effective in preventing crime and defusing tensions between refugees and locals (Kirişçi & Karaca, 2015). Societal tension is predictable to some extent because, from the beginning, Syrians were largely portrayed as temporary guests with limited rights. They were not seen as equal members/citizens. Thus, it was easy for them to become targets of blame or scapegoats for growing economic problems, such as inflation and unemployment, which they do not necessarily cause, but instead, have structural reasons. In some local contexts, like Şanlıurfa such tensions were mediated through the cooperation of Syrian community leaders and local religious actors, in other context like Gaziantep or Istanbul, tensions escalated quickly due to a lack of mediation efforts (Şahin Mencütek, 2020a, b).

3.4.1 Cultural Intimacy for Syrians as A Way of Combating Temporality

As stated above, the political discourses of guesthood, Ansar spirit and religious brotherhood were successfully formed by the Government Party leadership to accommodate the high number of Syrians. The Syrian interlocutors have reported ethnocultural, religious and historical ties between most Syrians and native Turkish citizens as the main source of comfort for their stay in Turkey. This can be seen as a local strategy or discourse to cope with the temporality imposed on them. This echoes what Michael Herzfeld (2005, 2013) calls cultural intimacy. This intimacy functions as a kind of reassurance for Syrian refugees to remain in Turkey despite social-economic difficulties, deprivation of rights, exclusion and exploitation in the labour market and in everyday life. Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy includes various acts and attitudes repeated by members of a group of people, which lead to the formation of a Manichean understanding of the world divided between "us" and "them". These acts and attitudes may range from essentialising culture and past, practising various stereotypes in everyday life, performing persuasive acts of resemblances, ordinary acts of embarrassment kept as intimate secrets of the group, and different forms of iconicity such as mythical, visual, musical and gastronomic images bridging a sense of resemblance with the other members of the group at large (Herzfeld, 2016).

The discourse of cultural and religious similarity is noticeable in the statements of the Syrian interviewees. A 40-year-old woman married with six children said the following when asked about the living conditions in İstanbul:

> Our third son travelled illegally to Germany, and he stayed there for 2.5 years. He learned German and reached a very good level in it. But recently, when he was there, I felt that his attitude began to change. My husband told me, "I would try hard to make him come back to Turkey but without letting him [the son] know about that.". I believe that Turkey is better than other countries, it is an Islamic country, and we can hear the sound of *ezan* [call to

> prayer)] here, this advantage is enough. We decided to stay here, and we didn't want to go to another country because we would again start from scratch, so we decided to stay here until our country's situation became better (Interview_İstanbul_16 July 2018_OzU).

Our interlocutors in İstanbul have mostly expressed their appreciation for the city's welcoming culture at all levels. A 37-year-old-woman with two children said the following when she was asked whether she wanted to go to Europe: "No, I don't think that we will use this chance, and even if we did, we don't want to go there mainly because of the kids, they got used to being here. My son always says that my country is Turkey, my president is Erdogan" (Interview_İstanbul_25 July 2018_OzU).

There are, of course, some other interlocutors in İstanbul who have mixed feelings and experiences as far as their encounters with the locals are concerned. A 37-year-old man married with four children in Balat, İstanbul, said the following when asked how the locals are receiving him:

> It's mixed; there are those whom I would like to thank, such as the Turkish government, and the Turkish people in general, without exception, those who accepted me well and those who didn't. Because none of the Arab countries or any other country in the world, except Germany, did what Turkey did. Turkey accepted and received us. I see that all the world governments and all the world countries are conspiring against the Syrian people (Interview_İstanbul_1 August 2018_Bilgi).

Similarly, our interlocutors in Şanlıurfa frequently stated that they feel at home because of cultural, religious, linguistic, and geographical similarities. Syrians who found refuge in the border cities in the Southeast Turkey are reminded by their collective memory that Aleppo, the province where they mostly come from, was the third most cosmopolitan province of the Ottoman Empire after İstanbul and İzmir, and also that Aleppo province included some cities which are now parts of Turkey such as Hatay, Kilis and Şanlıurfa (Watenpaugh, 2005). A 23-year-old single woman said the following about her everyday life in the city: "I am very happy here. Sometimes I miss Syria, of course, but here I have my aunt, my neighbours. We are communicating with them very well. I also have very good relations with the people in my workplace. They are like my family. I don't really feel like a stranger here" (Interview_Şanlıurfa_16 July 2018_SRII).

This kind of similarity comforts Syrians is limited to religious and linguistic aspects and gastronomic and musical tastes on both sides. As one manifestation of this, the number of Syrian restaurants has rapidly increased in İstanbul, Şanlıurfa, Bursa and other cities. These restaurants attract not only Arab tourists who feel a kind of cultural intimacy with the food and beverages served there but also Turkish locals who feel a similar cultural intimacy with the Arabic cuisine, which has always been an essential part of the cosmopolitan Ottoman cuisine. Similarly, the number of Syrian street music bands is also increasing. Radio stations such as *Al-Kol*, *Muftah* and *Alwan* were established in İstanbul to broadcast to the emerging Syrian diaspora in Turkey and the homeland in Syria (Alarabiya News, 2013). The sound of Arabic music echoing in the streets of cities such as İstanbul and Şanlıurfa as well as in the Arabic radio stations, construct new bridges between the Syrian refugees

and the members of the local communities. They are somehow appealing by virtue of their resemblance to the popular Turkish Arabesque music (Kaya, 2017a, b). In general, there are clear signs of diaspora formation in the Syrian refugee communities, which also build more transnational connections (Şahin Mencütek, 2020b).

It could be argued that cultural intimacy comes into play when Syrian refugees residing in İstanbul as well as in other parts of Turkey, especially in the Southeastern parts of the country, are asked to express their opinion about migrating further away to the European countries (Kaya & Kıraç, 2016; Fabbe et al., 2017). Their hesitation in going to Europe seems to derive partly from their strong belief that the Europeans disapprove of them and partly from the life-threatening nature of the journey, which has already led to the death of thousands of people *en route*. During the research, interlocutors often put forward that the tragedies that their Syrian fellows had to go through during their exodus from Syria to Greece have left very negative marks on them. The traces of the heart-breaking images of Aylan Kurdi, whose dead body was lying down on the Aegean shores of Bodrum, Turkey (Smith, 2015), were still fresh in the minds of the interlocutors when interviewed. When asked why they came to İstanbul a year ago and if they did not want to continue the journey to Europe, where her husband had been waiting for them for the last 3 years after he was smuggled to Germany, a 28-year-old mother with two children from Damascus residing in İstanbul expressed her fear of death with the following words:

> We first stayed in something like a studio. It was my brother's wife and me, and she also has a girl [crying]. We stayed for a period, trying so we would be able to continue our way through smuggling to Greece. They scared us too much about the journey. Death and no death, like that we kept hearing stuff like that a lot [crying], we… Whenever we went to see a smuggler and talked so that we would continue. I don't feel comfortable. [Smothered cry] We got scared. We gave up the idea. So that we would stay here and wait until family reunification happens, that was it (Interview_İstanbul_27 July 2018_Bilgi).

The cultural and religious similarity is undoubtedly an essential element, creating comfort zones for some Syrians. A 54-year-old man with two spouses and 11 children from Damascus said the following:

> Actually, we were thinking of fleeing to Europe in the beginning, but then we changed our minds; living there is hard. I would not have control over my kids and wife there. There, the rule is on their side. I could not control them anymore. I heard a lot of stories about women who arrived there and left their husbands and stayed with only their children. Just ten per cent are living there normally as a family. If a man wants to live there, he has to let the woman act like she wants (wearing a scarf or not, praying or not), but we are not like that. We like to live the traditional Syrian life in which the man is in control of the house. Another thing is, I thought about leaving Turkey because of its restrictions because of the Turkish people's treatment. I thought seriously about going to Egypt, but unfortunately, the Arab countries closed their doors in our faces. (Interview_İstanbul_29 July 2018_OzU)

During the field research, several testimonies, such as these, were expressed by our interlocutors. It seems that such cultural intimacy prevents most Syrians from generating a willingness to go to Europe. An extensive study conducted by Kaya and Kıraç (2016) in İstanbul in 2015 and 2016 revealed that only 1.6% of the interviewed Syrians were willing to go to Europe, while 79% expressed their willingness

to go back, and around 20% stated their willingness to stay in Turkey when the war is over. A similar tendency was revealed among the Syrian refugees surveyed in Gaziantep, Urfa, Hatay and İstanbul in 2016 (Fabbe et al., 2017). In their survey, it was around 5% were willing to go to Europe. Their hesitation to go to Europe can be explained through various factors: cultural intimacy with Turkey, ethnic and religious affinity with the natives in Turkey, most of the Syrians' being Sunni-Muslim-Arab who have communal, religious and ethnic ties in Turkey (especially in Southeast Turkey as well as in İstanbul), growing anti-refugee sentiments, Islamophobia and right-wing populism in Europe, the absence of safe passage to Europe, obvious risks at sea, the economic burden of the journey, and the news with regards to the deadly journeys circulated in the social and mainstream media (Rottmann & Kaya, 2021).

However, there is an increase in the tendency of Syrians to be willing to go to Europe. The survey conducted by the Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond Project (RESPOND) with 750 Syrians residing in İstanbul, İzmir, Şanlıurfa and Batman revealed that around 45% of Syrian respondents were ready to move further towards Europe if only there was a chance (Jancewicz, 2021). This representative survey reveals that Syrians are becoming less likely to stand for all kinds of socio-economic problems, unemployment, exploitation, intersectional forms of discrimination, societal and political polarisation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ramifications of growing Turkish nationalism that they face in everyday life.

It is undoubtedly a relief for Syrians to stay somewhere near their homeland so that they can stay connected with it and with their remaining relatives whom they can visit at least from time to time during the religious Eid season twice a year. The Turkish government allows Syrians to visit Syria for a total of 3 months during two Muslim religious festive/vacation (*bayram*) times if they apply in advance to the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management to get a travel permission document. A limited number of those who had visited Syria returned to their hometowns and only if they found conditions bearable; however, the majority returned to Turkey (Şahin Mencütek, 2020b, 130). Thousands of Syrians take advantage of the opportunity for short visits, not only to enjoy celebrations but also, to look after their properties and to visit relatives. The one situation that requires visits to Syria is the conduct of funerals. One interviewee from Şanlıurfa noted that adopting the funeral customs of Syrians in Turkey is quite difficult as they lived in smaller houses, where visits of their friends and the associated crowd at such times were not welcomed by local Turkish neighbours. It was also the case that the closest members of families, such as sons and daughters, tried to visit Syria for the funerals of their parents or other close kin. Such visits necessitated private travel permits for a week issued by the authorities in the border provinces (ibid.). Almost all of the interviewed Syrians reported that they often connected with close and distant relatives in Syria and those dispersed to other countries via mobile phones and social media. When refugees were asked about the existence of such connections in the form of emotional ties with the home country, themes about missing home, unhappiness and nostalgia were mentioned with the aspiration of moving back to Syria (Ibid.).

3.4.2 *Encounters with Officials, Civil Actors, and The Receiving Society*

Our research has revealed that most local residents where we conducted the fieldwork have been supportive of the rhetoric of the *Ansar Spirit* reified by state actors in general and the Government in particular. The *Ansar Spirit* has been embraced by pious Muslim Turkish citizens who perceive the Arabs and the Arabic language that they speak as sacred. The fact that Prophet Mohammad was of Arab origin, and the language of the Quran in Arabic, carries much significance for pious Muslims in Turkey and other non-Arabic geographies of Islam. The members of local communities in the municipal districts run by the Government party have often referred to the cultural and religious intimacy they have practised in everyday life with the Sunni-Arabs coming from Syria. Hence, religious and linguistic similarities are instrumentalised by Sunni-Muslim-Syrian refugees and by members of the Sunni-Muslim local communities who have already reified the language and the ethnicity of the Sunni Arabs (Kaya & Kıraç, 2016; Deniz et al., 2016).

However, some locals do not seem to be at ease with the *Ansar* Spirit. Our interlocutors mainly reported this kind of attitude in İzmir. A 35-year-old divorced woman with five children, two of whom live with her and three of whom stayed behind in Aleppo with her ex-husband, said the following when she was asked about the way the local inhabitants and authorities treat them:

> There is a bit of change now. I feel like they don't like us anymore. They used to help us before. For instance, I get milk support for my children. When I am not at home, they drop the milk at the office of the Muhtar (local authority). When I go there to pick up the milk, he screams at us, saying, "We don't want Syrians anymore" (Interview_İzmir_30 July 2018_SRII).

During the fieldwork in İzmir, we encountered more such experiences compared to İstanbul, Ankara and Şanlıurfa. A 27-year-old Arab woman married with two children from Aleppo said the following along the same lines:

> Yesterday, I was waiting at the bus station in the queue to go to the hospital. There were two other Syrians in the queue. A Turkish woman came and told us to get out of the queue as we were Syrian, she said first Turks would get on the bus, and then the Syrians would get on. She was not a bus driver; and she was another passenger. She did not allow us to sit down and looked at us strangely. Such incidences happen on buses too. They accuse us of making the bus crowded (Interview_İzmir_16 August 2018_SRII).

Similarly, a 48-year-old man married with four children said the following when asked how they were received by the locals in İzmir:

> In the first years, we encountered good people, but in the last year, we faced bad people. Once, young boys came in front of our house, they stoned our house, and they said bad things to us. They say these things in the school of my daughter too. "Suriyeli bomba" (Syrian bomb) "okula gelme" (don't come to school). Her teacher is very good, but some pupils treat our daughter badly. Similarly, one day, one girl did not want to play with my daughter. Her mother came and warned them and wanted her to play with my daughter too (Interview_İzmir_17 August 2018_SRII).

A Syrian Turcoman father living in İzmir told us that.

> In the first years, the locals loved us and treated us very well, but then they got tired of Syrians as Syrians became more crowded here. I have sons working in shoe-making workshops. I advise them to be invisible, to come home directly from their work, not stay outside at night, and not talk Arabic in public spaces like on the bus. We are not wanted anymore (Interview_İzmir_04 August 2018_SRII).

This kind of discourse has also become relatively widespread in printed and social media. In the case of a popular conservative-pious-Muslim poet, İsmet Özel has treated the Syrian refugees as "traitors" (Özel, 2016). Defining the Arabs as traitors in Turkey is actually a rather old habit dating back to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century and early 20th century. Turkish nationalists perceived the Arabs in those days as "traitors" since they believed that the Arab nationalists stabbed the Turks in their back by collaborating with the western imperialist forces (Pope & Pope, 1997). Such a stereotype is still powerful in the collective memory of Turkish citizens.

Refugees are easily portrayed as inferior, malign, dangerous, or threatening (Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). Due to lacking the resources of public communication and relevant language skills as well as concerns about their safety, most refugees are unable to contest such labelling, stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes generated by the majority society (Marfleet, 2007, 2013). Social acceptance of Syrians shows fluctuations as public attitude surveys display (Erdoğan, 2015, 2017). In their electoral campaigns, the main oppositional parties had also employed such a xenophobic discourse prior to the 07 June 2015 General Elections. The Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) were using a populist discourse scapegoating Syrian refugees for the political, social and economic ills in Turkey (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019). Syrian refugees have been instrumentalised by both parties to express their critique against the AKP, which they blamed for deepening the Syrian crisis in the first place, thus leading to massive migration of Syrians to Turkey at the expense of Turkish citizens (Werz et al., 2015). Upon growing criticisms from civil society organisations and academics, it should also be noted here that both parties, especially the CHP, gave up on such discourses prior to the second general elections held on 01 November 2015 and have since then used a rather constructive and friendly discourse vis-a-vis the Syrians (Canyaş et al., 2016). However, the CHP leader repeated the same anti-refugee discourse in response to the Government's efforts to grant citizenship to Syrians prior to the constitutional change referendum on 16 April 2017 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2017, 2019b). The 2018 local election results also sparked crackdowns, as mentioned at the beginning of this book. As of late 2021, the Syrian refugee issue became the most popular issue which has been discussed by opposition parties to criticize the Government. Scapegoating Syrians for all domestic policies and offering repatriation as a solution seem to remain on the domestic political agenda for a while, signalling the implications of strategic temporality.

3.5 Conclusion: Challenges and Prospects

It is well-known that harsh reception policies become a tool to ensure the temporary nature of refugee stays. The Turkish reception system demonstrates how the responsibility for the reception of refugees is delegated to the local bodies and how the politics of subsidiarity can be associated with an extension of the reception period. In the beginning, urban refugees under temporary protection were not offered any support by the state to meet their urgent needs, such as food, water, housing, and clothing. Civil society organisations, local administrations, and international organisations provided Syrian migrants with their basic needs. It is the EU's ESSN programme brought a structured scheme to meet their basic needs. Urban refugees have always been exposed to more difficult conditions, such as poverty, expensive housing and rents, exploitation of labour, shelter, education, health services, insecure circumstances for women and children, human trafficking, and growing xenophobia.

The mounting discourse calling for the return of Syrians in the past few years has replaced the initial discourses of guesthood and the Ansar spirit. The ruling elite has refrained from using a discourse of integration as they strongly believe that it is the discourse of return, which will politically pay off. In the midst of the growing calls for their return, Syrians have started to feel even more threatened under temporary protection. Even in the initial period, the reception system generated liminality and uncertainty because of political discourses produced by the AKP government promoting a temporary religious-based charity and guesthood discourse at the expense of a more permanent right-based discourse. At the societal level, welcoming and positive attitudes at the beginning of arrivals have been gradually replaced by negative attitudes, a rise in discrimination, hostile attitudes and sporadic violence targeting refugees, not only in metropolitan cities like Ankara and Istanbul but also in the border cities, like Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa where there are stronger ethnic and kinship relations with local and Syrian communities. The observed changes in relations at the local and state levels over time provide some insights into the negative outcomes of strategic temporality embedded in Turkey's national reception system. Undoubtedly, these features of the reception phase lead to a similar erosion in overall relations related to protection and integration dimensions, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

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