

BOOK REVIEW**Bucken-Knapp, Gregg, Omanović, Vedran, and Spehar, Andrea. 2020. *Institutions and Organizations of Refugee Integration. Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Syrian Refugees in Sweden*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 130 pp**

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In this book, Gregg Bucken-Knapp, Vedran Omanović and Andrea Spehar illuminate ambiguous sentiments within Swedish integration policies by highlighting refugees' experiences. Despite Sweden being considered as having one of the most successful integration politics in Europe, the regulations are not absent of implicit meanings, uncertainties and paradoxical turns. The authors draw on 90 interviews conducted with the members of two displaced groups, Syrian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian (BiH), which comprise the largest nationally identified groups of refugees in Europe since the 1951 Refugee Convention. Thus, by providing a long-term overview that extends over the past 30 years (1990–2020), the authors demonstrate that a governed economic integration continues to be the most salient factor in Swedish immigration policies. Although the targets of the policies relate to the importance of work, refugees continue to encounter significant obstacles in the integration implementation, particularly with regard to language, applied pedagogies, slow educational and professional evaluations, lack of networks and social discrimination. Therefore, the authors stress the resourcefulness of refugees, introducing the term *sticktoitiveness* (p. 91) to highlight ingenuity and tireless agency, which their interlocutors employ to overcome obstacles and create a meaningful life of their own.

The book is currently available online, divided by chapters. In the first chapter, the authors delve into the debated meaning of integration. The hidden nuances and hinted intention of integration are particularly well drawn out as the term interrelates with other terms, such as assimilation, in both scholarly and policy documents. It is further recognised that implicit meanings and uncertainties impact the practices of street-level bureaucrats, that is personnel within state institutions and collaborating organisations that are charged with facilitating the integration process (pp. 2–3, 91), as they deal with the expectation of “successfully” integrating a large amount of people in a short amount of time. Lastly, the authors repeatedly stress

that labour integration must be considered in relation to other factors, such as available housing, educational evaluations and different municipal adherence to state policies (cf. pp. 5–6, 9–10).

The second chapter highlights how political landscapes influence the experiences of integration of refugees. The authors believe that it must be considered how the geopolitics in home and host countries interact in several ways, such as with regard to educational qualifications and gendered labour participation. One example is how the Schengen agreement was created in the 1990s, in part, to provide an amendable workforce, which would later influence the local perceptions of European outsiders and work ethics during the time of employment scarcities in the 2010s (pp. 26–30). Moreover, the authors stress the interrelation between the rise of xenophobia in the media and its public influence. This pushed for anti-immigration sentiments to be taken seriously in Swedish politics, which then led to paradoxical changes in integration policies (p. 30). On the one hand, integration policies were improved, for example, by raising awareness among the managers of companies and institutions on the benefits of employing people with diverse backgrounds (p. 31) and by broadening the language courses offered (p. 38). On the other hand, course attendance was a determining factor in gaining access to governmental support, such as housing (pp. 38–39). As the authors explain in later chapters, this condition proved to be difficult for the refugees for several reasons, such as courses offered being ill fitted for their needs and/or capabilities. Moreover, regulated housing policies became problematic as people were sometimes moved to areas where housing was plentiful but work was scarce, and vice versa. Furthermore, such moves potentially cut them off from building supportive networks. Thus, the authors stress the need to observe integration processes from the refugee's perspective.

In the third chapter, the authors explain the need to include refugee voices in the methodology used to evaluate integration policies. This is an all too familiar argument for anthropologists, as the authors do indeed point out (p. 46). However, as this publication is situated within political science, the authors efficiently state this requirement. Moreover, the authors cover well the publications stemming from refugees themselves, such as autoethnographies, in the existing literature. Considering recent criticism voiced within refugee scholarship (Cabot 2019; Khosravi 2010), this heightens the value of this research alongside the fact that some of the authors have lived through the refugee and immigration experiences in Sweden.

The fourth chapter draws the focus to the experiences of BiH refugees who arrived in Sweden during the 1990s. The authors stress how people recalled the normalcy of life before the war, and their nostalgic hopes for return (pp. 65–66). As the conflicts drew on, such hopes were diminished, and more effort was made to integrate into Swedish societies. In doing so, some drew on the networks made with locals, whereas others relied on their own resourcefulness. Partly the need for labour facilitated their integration. Indeed, by interviewing late BiH refugee arrivals to Sweden, the authors are able demonstrate that when the labour market became saturated, other social barriers rapidly emerged (pp. 76–78). Moreover, the BiH experiences illuminate how language barriers are interrelated with other obstacles, such as the slow evaluation of education, finding and renting places and being considered for jobs, particularly those that are highly skilled (p. 72). Thus, this chapter and the next highlight how refugees sidestep their street-level bureaucrats when assistance is found inadequate. Although several persons remember their case workers fondly, most attribute their success to their own efforts.

Recognising the more recent arrival of Syrian refugees, the fifth chapter compares the experiences of the two refugee groups to explore similarities and differences. Both groups shared the descriptions of normalcy prior to the war, and uncertainties, waitness and frustration during the first period of refugeehood, after which they expressed desires to create a decent

life in their new locations. One of the main differences between the groups includes the level of social exclusion and demeaning attitudes from street-level bureaucrats the Syrians encountered, such as from teachers and social workers. Paradoxically, the authors also remark on the lower educational certificates of Syrians (p. 27) but highlight educated voices in the citations. These express frustration with slow process of evaluation but also cultural stigma, such as the disbelief that a veiled woman could be well educated (pp. 97–100). Stigma was also tied with being mothers of several children, as well as their current living areas (p. 101). As such, exclusionary experiences were particularly voiced by women.

Several Syrians also remarked on the inadequate pedagogy applied in language courses because of the absence of teachers, the self-taught approach and the written aspect of the language lessons (p. 95). Thus, educational stigma was built around individual blame for not measuring up, without consideration for how Syrians arrive from a different pedagogical approach and writing styles. Moreover, Syrians relayed the pressing need to practice spoken language as that facilitated building essential networks, which helped them to obtain decent jobs (p. 96). Therefore, their own resilience, or *sticktoitiveness*, was employed to find, follow and create opportunities (pp. 91, 105–108). Some even used their acquired network, skills, and social media to become street-brokers for later arrived compatriots. As such, they reclaimed some of the time lost to them in waithood.

In the concluding section, the authors point out that although Swedish integration policies are considered the most efficient internationally, there is still room for improvement. This can be discerned by the lived experience of the policy implementation among refugees, as expressed in the book. While recognising the overall pressure within the integration system from various actors, the authors suggest implementing patience and attendance (pp. 123–124), as well as including representatives from the refugee groups in policymaking.

Overall, the book offers clear insight into the structure of Swedish integration policies and lived experiences among its targets. It brings forth a much-needed comparison over time and between different groups, highlighting overarching experiences while recognising differences. Theoretically, the authors add to the growing knowledge on the Nordic model of mimicry (cf. Maurer & Hvenegård-Lassen 2012), drawing out the governed model of the submissive refugee worker in Sweden while refugee rights have subtly and non-subtly become conditioned to assimilation, rather than integration. This is followed by adding to the knowledge on discrimination that Muslim women encounter in the Global North.

Lastly, the authors introduce the term *sticktoitiveness*, that highlights endurance and resourcefulness. Although the term is a bit of a tongue twister, it is particularly insightful and useful to apply in refugee studies. Problematic, however, is the insistence of the authors that pre-war normalcy is the consistent, authentic characteristic of refugeeeness, as that invites the danger of integration policies being non-responsive to people arriving from long-term and forgotten wars, such as from Afghanistan or Palestine, or from various ethnic minorities whose childhoods are not defined by normalcy. As such, I recommend reading this book, but also encourage critical discussion, by students and scholars across all studies on migration.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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