REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: SYRIANS IN CANADA, GERMANY, TURKEY, AND THE UNITED STATES

by

Aysegul Balta Ozgen
June 2019

A dissertation submitted to the
faculty of the Graduate School of
the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Acknowledgements

This dissertation exists thanks to the energy and effort of dozens of people. I am grateful for everybody's contribution, and I ask for understanding for the names that I cannot share because of confidentiality.

My biggest gratitude goes to my 130 respondents, including Syrian refugees and my key informants. Thank you for trusting me and sharing your stories, feelings, and ideas with me. Thank you for welcoming me into your places, feeding me, and making me feel at home. I am happy if I was able to tell your stories by doing justice to them.

Funding from the National Science Foundation, the Mark Diamond Research Fund, and the UB College of Arts and Sciences enabled collection and analysis of the data for this work. I appreciate their support.

I thank my advisor and dissertation chair Robert Adelman and my committee members Erin Hatton, Debi Street, and Rick Su for their continuous support, patience, and guidance in the process. They were always available to meet whenever I needed, they read and edited hundreds of pages, they wrote countless letters of recommendation, but most importantly, they helped me to develop into an independent scholar and researcher.

I thank other faculty members of UB Sociology as well. Mary Nell Trautner gave great feedback to my proposals and made sure that I never ran out of funding. Ashley Barr and Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk contributed with their brilliant minds to my practice job talk. Chris Mele has been a wonderful role model with his questions and ways of thinking.

I spent two years collecting data in four countries. I would be lost without the help of some old and new friends. In Istanbul, Doğuş Şimşek, Didem Danış, and Deniz Sert guided me to find my topic of study back in 2015. Serhat Balta and Hakkı Ocakaçan helped me to find

respondents. In Toronto, Betül Keleş has been a wonderful friend and host. I occupied her apartment for weeks, and I could not do it without her limitless generosity. Sahilde Top, Ümit Kızıltan, and Adnan Türegün connected me to my initial respondents. Jennifer Hyndman, Michele Millard, and Faida Abu-Ghazaleh at the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University have been super friendly and helpful during my Visiting Graduate Fellowship and afterward. In Buffalo, I learned a lot from the Refugee Roundtable, and I thank its organizers for accepting me into the network. In Berlin, Serhat Karakayalı enabled my affiliation with the Berlin Institute for Integration and Migration Research at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Ulaş Karakoç, Sinem Adar, Burcu Toğral Koca, and Ayşen Üstübici connected me to other people. Murad Awad worked as my interpreter, and eventually, he became my guide and friend. Hamide and Şöhret at the bakery on Grünberger Straße have become like my family during my time in Berlin, and I am thankful for our long conversations during breakfast and coffee times.

Rawan Arar was the presider at the roundtable in one of the ASA annual meetings when I presented an earlier version of this work. I thank her for her fantastic feedback and for being such an honorable role model and friend.

I would like to thank my research assistants Renette Shao Ying Lee, Andrea Amoateng, and Matthania Volmy for their help with the transcription and coding of the data. Thanks to you, I did not go through a second surgery for my wrist. I am glad if I were able to increase your interest in sociology a little bit.

At UB, there are four very significant people I owe a lot to: my dearest friends Aslı Yalım, Yulin Yang, Jared Strohl, and Vinay Kumar. You listened to me, you thought with me, you were always there at happy and sad times, you never complained, and you made me a better

person. Without you, my years in Buffalo would have been terribly boring and dry. I am so lucky to have you as my best friends in this place.

The latest addition to our family was our cat Patiska. Every day she slept on my desk behind my computer like an angel and made me write regularly to finish this dissertation. Patuş, thank you for making me a happier person. Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my mother Nurşen Balta, my father Selahattin Balta, and my husband Aykun Özgen. You never stopped supporting and loving me. Without you, I simply could not survive, let alone graduate. Thank you for everything.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures

Abstract

How are possibilities of refugee integration shaped within different policy and national contexts? Why do refugees in one host country perceive a better future for themselves than refugees in another host country? I address these questions with a comparative design: I focus on Syrian refugees displaced since 2011, and I compare their integration experiences in Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the United States. I seek to understand the mechanisms that explain the possibilities and pathways of refugee integration. I aim to find out what works best in different countries, and why. Drawing on 130 in-depth interviews (98 with refugees and 32 with key informants), I identify three main dimensions of refugee integration experiences: (1) socio-economic, (2) legal, and (3) cultural/political. These dimensions interact with each other, and experiences of integration vary along the lines of gender, age, marital status, and social and cultural capital as well. I find that when refugees believe their legal status and future in one place is uncertain, when they perceive a loss of economic and/or cultural capital, and when they feel unwelcome, their beliefs about their prospects of integration decline sharply. Their expectations for successful integration increase when refugees perceive a supportive environment from the native-born population suggesting that refugee policies should move beyond the provision of permanent legal status and basic welfare support. This dissertation contributes to the literature by using an international comparative perspective with qualitative data, by introducing Turkey from the Global South into the comparative picture, and by exploring the integration experiences of refugees rather than conventional immigrants.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

I had the chance to interview the very first Syrian families resettled in Toronto and Buffalo. I did not plan for this; it was my pure luck as a researcher. Their receptions were completely different. The family in Toronto was welcomed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the airport. In fact, the family appeared on television throughout the world. In Buffalo, on the other hand, the father of the first Syrian family was unaccompanied and was lost on his second day in the country when he had to go to the hospital because of a broken leg. He did not find his way back to his new apartment until late at night. These anecdotes illustrate that contexts and conditions of the arrival of Syrian refugees differ significantly from country to country, and they lead Syrians to have different perceptions about their chances for the future in their new location. Therefore, I start this dissertation with this question: what do Syrian refugees experience in distinct policy and national contexts?

The plight of refugees is an international crisis. My research focuses on refugees displaced since 2011, from one decimated country, Syria. I compare the integration experiences of recent Syrian refugees in four countries: Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the United States. My goal is to better understand the pathways and mechanisms that explain the integration process for refugees. I focus on Syrian refugees for a variety of reasons, but one of them is because they are dispersed in many countries. Thus, my research questions are: How are possibilities of integration shaped within different policy and national contexts? Why do refugees in one host country perceive a better future for themselves than refugees in another host country? Among Syrian refugees, how do they experience and perceive integration in Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the United States? How do key informants (such as representatives of non-governmental

organizations and resettlement agencies) in these countries understand and explain the impact of their country-specific national policies on Syrian refugees' integration?

Two issues drive the flexible analytic frame (Ragin and Amoroso 2011) of this comparative design. First, governments vary in terms of refugee integration policies. They allocate different amounts of resources for the economic, social, cultural, and legal participation of refugees. Second, the degree of success in the integration of immigrants and refugees in host societies varies. Generally, success means that newcomers' chances of inclusion and self-sufficiency approximate the rest of a country's population. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is one useful tool that measures migrant integration policies in 38 countries (all EU Member States, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States) (MIPEX 2015). Using MIPEX rankings as an index of countries that host Syrian refugees and the two questions driving the frame, I selected the four countries to compare. Table 1 illustrates these contrasts well. In short, low scores on the MIPEX ranking reflect more effective immigrant integration policies relative to higher scores.

Table 1: Typology of Integration Policies and Perceptions of Immigrant Integration

	Canada	U.S.	Germany	Turkey
MIPEX ranking	6	9	10	38
Is there a formal government refugee integration policy?	+	+	+	-
Is there a perception of successful immigrant integration?	+	+	-	-

Canada is a relative success story, both in terms of policies and perceptions of immigrant integration (Alba and Foner 2014; MIPEX 2015). The federal government allocates resources for integration of not only refugees, but all other categories of newcomers too. In the U.S., there is also a well-developed refugee resettlement system that provides access to economic and social support. The federal government in collaboration with states and local actors spends more resources to integrate refugees than other immigrant groups (Singer and Wilson 2006). However,

in contrast to Canada, there is no comprehensive immigrant integration policy. Rather, the U.S. adopts a *laissez-faire* approach. Except for refugees, the government does not play a formal role in immigrant integration (Bloemraad and de Graauw 2011). Yet, there is much evidence to suggest that in the U.S., immigrants integrate into society over time, especially among the second generation and beyond (Gordon 1964; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 1997; Waters et al. 2010; Alba and Nee 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2008).

After a long history of ethnic nationalism, Germany has a relatively recent immigrant integration policy, but successful immigrant integration has not yet occurred (Meier-Braun and Weber 2013; Koopmans 2013; Kurthen and Schmitter Heisler 2009; Alba and Foner 2014; Brubaker 2001). In Turkey, there is no immigrant or refugee integration policy, because newcomers are viewed as temporary guests (Kirişçi 2007; Soykan 2012; Biehl 2015). Consequently, full integration of refugees in Turkey is difficult in the absence of permanent legal rights.

The term "immigrant" includes many types of migrants such as labor, family-reunification, permanent, temporary, circular, undocumented, and refugees, among others. From these categories, I focus on refugees for two reasons. First, refugees are an internationally protected and specifically defined category regulated with special conventions and laws such as the 1951 Geneva Convention (UNHCR 1951). All signatory governments (Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the U.S. are among them) have certain policies toward refugees, even though they may be minimal and may exist in a larger national environment that lacks comprehensive policies for all immigrants. Second, compared to other types of migrants, refugees leave their homes and arrive in host countries abruptly, often without a smooth transition. Because of that, they contribute to the intense visibility of national/ethnic/racial conflicts. Therefore, refugees

might have a more difficult process of integration compared to other types of migrants, and, thus, they deserve close examination.

Based on the data I collected in Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the United States, I identify three main dimensions of refugee integration experiences: (1) socio-economic, (2) legal, and (3) cultural/political. My findings suggest that when refugees believe their legal status and future in one place is uncertain, when they perceive a loss of economic and/or cultural capital, and when they feel unwelcome, their beliefs about their prospects of integration decline sharply. Their expectations for successful integration go up when refugees perceive a supportive environment from the native-born population suggesting that refugee policies should move beyond provision of permanent legal status and basic welfare support.

This dissertation advances knowledge in concrete ways. First, using an international comparison with qualitative data is a clear strength of this research. Comparison allows for the development of a typology of different countries' reactions to refugees, as well as similarities and differences in the mechanisms of integration. Comparative studies typically examine classic Western immigrant-receiving countries. Thus, another contribution of this research is the introduction of Turkey from the Global South into the comparative picture. Turkey is a new actor that has only recently become an immigrant-receiving country, but is an important part of the bigger network of Syrian refugees. Turkey's relative lack of integration policies and its open-door policy toward Syrian refugees (at the beginning of the crisis) should provide new insights in the comparative literature on immigrant integration. Consequently, this research design will be able to extend to other countries in the future.

Second, this dissertation contributes to research on immigrant integration by exploring the experiences of refugees rather than conventional immigrants. Due to several factors such as

forced migration, traumatic experiences, relatively abrupt arrival, little choice, and a lack of a smooth transition, refugees might be expected to have a more difficult process of integration compared to other types of migrants. Alternatively, special policies for refugees that do not pertain to conventional immigrants might actually give them advantages, at least in terms of some components of what is measured as "integration." In that sense, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of refugee integration differentiated from immigrant integration.

Third, I examine refugees' experiences in their initial few years in their new locations, rather than integration outcomes in the long run. Concerning their integration, the key questions become how much socio-economic capital the refugees lost and how they will close the gap in their new country. What are the systems' opportunities and limitations that shape refugees' socio-economic integration experiences? Do the policies allow to regain their lost socio-economic capital, and how? This dissertation contributes to the literature by answering these questions with a comparative research design.

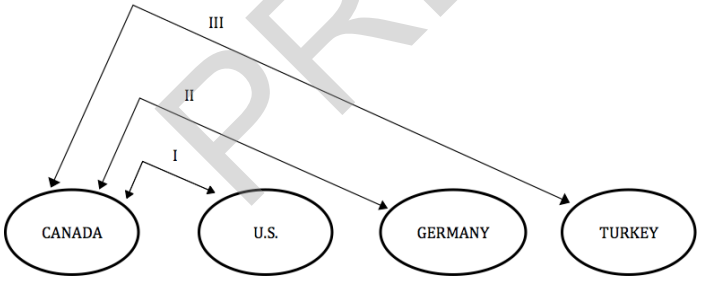
Finally, this dissertation contributes to discussions that try to understand the meaning and implications of temporariness beyond the classical dichotomy of temporary versus permanent. When examining the construction of this dichotomy, scholars typically discuss what policies or governments offer immigrants. However, this scholarship often ignores refugees' perceptions, and I aim to fill this gap. This dissertation contributes to this debate by challenging the taken-for-granted dichotomy.

2. Data and Methods

In this dissertation I seek to understand the processes that help explain the possibilities and pathways of integration for refugees. Syrians are dispersed in many countries around the world, so I ask: How are their chances in different countries shaped? How do they reach different

or similar outcomes when faced with distinct social institutions in varied national contexts? Why refugees move to, and how they are received in, host countries are related phenomena connected to a global system of migration. Therefore, in order to approach this puzzle holistically, I study this problem using an international comparative design. Comparative analysis is an appropriate way to develop explanations that are generalizable beyond unique cases (Skocpol 1979). Comparative studies of multiple sites present advantages to explain convergences and divergences across outcomes (FitzGerald 2012). I use Mill's methods of similarity and difference to sketch an analytic frame, but only in a flexible way (Ragin and Amoroso 2011). Using Mill's method of agreement and difference mechanistically is close to impossible, because in this non-experimental study I cannot isolate the effects of each independent variable (FitzGerald 2012; Ragin 1987; Lieberson 1991).

Figure 1: Comparison of Cases



As visualized in Figure 1, I design three comparisons keeping Canada constant as the best case of immigrant integration (see Table 1 for relevant factors). Comparison I is between Canada and the U.S. – the most similar cases. In both countries, there is refugee integration policy and perceptions of successful integration. Holding these constant, the comparison should show the reasons for any different outcomes. Comparison II is between Canada and Germany. They are

similar in terms of the existence of a refugee integration policy, but different in terms of expected integration. This comparison will show why there is a divergence between the two countries although they are favorable in terms of integration policies. Comparison III is between Canada and Turkey – the most dissimilar cases. Turkey represents what can reasonably be expected to be the most unfavorable outcomes in terms of both integration policies and perceptions of integration. Given the lack of integration policies, any positive integration experiences of Syrians in Turkey will be necessary to explain.

From each country, I chose one city in which to sample respondents: Toronto, Canada; Buffalo, New York U.S.; Istanbul, Turkey; and Berlin, Germany. These cities are meant to represent their respective countries, because, to a large extent, in each country immigration and integration policies are a federal/national matter. Obviously, living in large highly urbanized cities is not the same as living in a rural town; however, even in that comparison, national policies are the same. I have chosen these cities because they are all among the top Syrian-receiving cities in their respective countries (Katz, Noring, and Garrelts 2016; CIC 2017; DGMM 2017; RPC 2017). Moreover, access to resources and organizations necessary for social and economic integration of refugees exists in all of these cities. I acknowledge that while Toronto, Istanbul, and Berlin are more comparable in terms of population size and cosmopolitan character, Buffalo is less so. However, the United States does not prefer to resettle Syrian refugees in large cosmopolitan metropolises because of their expensive living conditions. For example, as of September 2017, there were only 58 Syrian refugees resettled in Los Angeles, 28 in New York City, and 11 in Boston while the majority of Syrian refugees in the U.S. are resettled in medium-sized and smaller metropolitan areas such as Troy, NY; Glendale, AZ; Clinton Township, MI; Sacramento, CA; or Erie, PA (RPC 2017). Given that these areas have

similar refugee profiles, I selected Buffalo because I have extended contacts in the area. Buffalo is a perfect representative of Rust Belt cities where refugees are disproportionately being resettled with deep refugee networks in the area. 405 Syrian refugees have been sent to Buffalo as of September 2017, more than in NYC, Boston, and Los Angeles combined.

In this design, my unit of analysis is the individual, and I aim to see how individual refugees' experiences of integration vary across different countries and contexts. However, I am not only focusing on individuals. Rather, I examine how structures, institutions, and/or policies affect potential integration pathways (Bloemraad 2013). My individual-level data are not generalizable because of my respondent selection strategies (see below). However, the strength of my comparative research design relies on its ability to inform and provide qualitative insight on integration mechanisms and to foster theory-building (Bloemraad 2013; FitzGerald 2012).

I examine socioeconomic status (e.g., education, employment, poverty and welfare dependency, and residential status), social and cultural life, and legal participation (e.g., legal status and plans for naturalization) as dimensions of Syrian refugees' integration into host societies. I assess integration by examining the ways in which refugees have or have not become similar to citizens along each dimension. In other words, I consider the extent to which refugees are included or excluded in a host society along each dimension described above. I define success as self-sufficiency, relative inclusion, and a mode of existence in which refugees "have equal opportunities to lead just as dignified, independent and active lives as the rest of the population" (MIPEX 2015). Successful integration entails not only a change among immigrants, but also in the host society. Governments (via policy and personnel), NGOs, resettlement agencies, the refugees, and the host society more generally are the constituent parts related to refugee integration. Therefore, I examine perceptions of integration not only among Syrian

refugees themselves, but also among other key informants such as representatives of community and non-governmental organizations in the four countries. Since these key informants are more experienced with the immigration and asylum systems of their respective countries, I learn about their perceptions of the policy context that shapes refugees' experiences.

My goal is not to measure integration outcomes *per se*. Rather, my goal is to assess the pathways and perceptions of integration among Syrian refugees, and this has already started in these four countries. As of 2018 (the year I completed data collection), most Syrians have been living in Turkey for six years, in Germany for three years, and in Canada and the United States for two years. This dimension of time spent in the host country may have an impact on perceptions of integration; however, having spent longer time somewhere is not a sufficient condition for integration. Therefore, while time likely matters, I do not consider time as the factor of primary importance for my purposes.

In order to focus on the issue of integration, and not complicate the analysis by factors such as national origin, I study only one nationality group of refugees (Syrians) across the four countries. I chose Syrians because they are the most recent and the largest group of refugees globally, with a refugee population of about 6.5 million by mid-2018 (UNHCR 2019). But I did not choose Syrians because I expect something unique regarding their integration compared to refugees from other countries. UNHCR reports that by mid-2018, there were about 514,000 Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Germany, about 3,600,000 registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, about 46,000 resettled refugees in Canada, and about 20,500 resettled refugees in the U.S. (UNHCR 2019). Comparing the same group in different locations serves as an analytical strategy (Bloemraad 2013) to focus on the mechanisms of integration.

Having said that, I also acknowledge that Syrians are not quite the same across the four countries, because there is bound to be some selection bias across the nations. My own evidence suggests that the most vulnerable or the most educated refugees are selected for resettlement in the U.S. and Canada, those who could pay smugglers went to Germany, and the ones who could not afford smuggling remained in Turkey. In addition, the Syrian population is not homogenous in terms of ethnicity and religion. There are ethnic Arab, Kurdish, and Turkmen Syrians, as well as Sunni, Alawite, and Christian Syrians. Since ethnic/religious distinctions do not apply to all four countries in my sample, I sought to interview mostly Sunni Arabs in order to make similar comparisons across the countries. But I interviewed Kurdish, Turkmen, Alawite, and Christian Syrians as well. I expected that the sorting mechanism for Syrian refugees to perceive integration differently might be based on issues such as gender, socio-economic status, education, and family status. Therefore, I sampled for variation based on these factors as well.

As for my sampling strategy, I used a snowball sampling method. I contacted the initial respondents through references, and then asked them to refer me to other refugees they know. In order to ensure that I did not limit variation with regard to social relationships, I did not pursue more than three contacts from any single interview participant. Moreover, I had a working network in Istanbul and Buffalo among NGOs and resettlement agencies because I volunteered for four of them in the past. My Syrian respondents in Buffalo and other contacts through NGOs helped facilitate the recruitment of respondents in Toronto and Berlin as well. As for key informants, I found important organizations in each city via a google search, and then I emailed them and asked for appointments and referrals.

UNHCR defines a refugee as someone who, owing to a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or

political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR 1951:3). Nonetheless, it is important to note that I did not limit my sample to individuals who are officially recognized as refugees by UNHCR. Rather, I included all types of Syrians who left Syria because of the war since 2011 and have various legal statuses in Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the U.S.

As for the languages in which I collected data, I am a native speaker of Turkish, and a fluent speaker of German and English. I can read, write, and speak in these languages well enough to read the literature and conduct interviews. I cannot speak Arabic fluently though I can understand it at an elementary level. Therefore, I interviewed Syrian refugees who can speak English, German or Turkish on my own, and I used an interpreter for respondents who spoke only Arabic.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents

	Istanbul	**Toronto**	**Buffalo**	**Berlin**	**Total**
Refugees	34	23	19	22	98
Key Informants	4	9	9	10	32
Total	38	32	28	32	130

Table 3: Gender Distribution of Refugee Respondents

	Istanbul	**Toronto**	**Buffalo**	**Berlin**	**Total**
Men	20	16	12	18	66
Women	14	7	7	4	32
Total	34	23	19	22	98

My primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees and other key informants. Between June 2016 and June 2018, I conducted 98 interviews with refugees and 32 interviews with key informants, thus 130 interviews in total. The distributions of respondents can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3. About 20 refugee interviews per country was a

reasonable sample size, because experience shows that it allows for saturation. For example, I understood that I had reached saturation when my respondents kept telling me the same stories. When there were no new data, themes, or codes there is saturation (Fusch and Ness 2015). The data for this research project are in-depth responses to open ended-questions collected during in-person interviews. The interview guide for refugees covered three general topics: background information, living conditions in the host country, and plans for the future. The interview guide for other key informants also covered three general topics: background information about their organization/institution, their opinions about immigration policies/implementation, and their observations about Syrian refugees' experiences. Each interview was about an hour long on average. Eleven respondents did not consent for the voice recorder, and in those cases I took detailed handwritten notes during interviews. All other interviews were voice-recorded with a digital recorder, fully transcribed, coded, and inductively analyzed to identify larger themes and findings. After the interviews, I wrote separate field notes and observer's comments in which I recorded my own thoughts and feelings as well (Bogdan and Biklen 1992).

A team of three undergraduate research assistants and I handled all of the transcriptions. I checked each transcript for errors and filled in any parts of the transcript that the research assistants could not understand. I systematically reviewed the transcripts line by line to organize the text and "discover patterns within that organizational structure" (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003:31). A large number of coding categories emerged which I linked together as larger themes. In data analysis, I read the interview transcripts together with my fieldnotes and observer's comments, and wrote memos to develop links. In these memos, I wrote about the relationship between "larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues" (Bogdan and Biklen

1992:159). Thus, the memos served as an intermediary step between coding and writing the first draft of the data analysis.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Immigrant and Refugee Integration

Immigrant integration has long been a focal point in the sociological literature on migration (Gordon 1964; Zhou 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Waters et al. 2010). Social scientists have examined differences between immigrants and native-born citizens, change across generations for immigrants and host societies, acculturation of immigrants, and the effects of immigration on racial dynamics (especially in American society) (Gordon 1964; Lieberson 1980; De Wind and Kasinitz 1997; Massey et al. 2003; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Hochschild et al. 2012).

Much of the social scientific debate revolves around assimilation. Early scholars used assimilation in an ethnocentric and hierarchical sense. In their straight-line assimilation model, they described the culture of a middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant population as the norm that immigrants should adapt to in the short- and long-term. The original connotation of assimilation meant a one-way process of acculturation into the mainstream, in which immigrants' ethnic culture and language would disappear over the course of several generations. Gordon (1964) identified seven stages of assimilation ranging from cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude-receptional, and behavior-receptional, to civic assimilation. More recent scholars, such as Alba and Nee (2003), have re-oriented the term to mean that the mainstream itself is being re-made with the incorporation of immigrants. Thus, today the term is not used as in the straight-line model, but a complicated process of give and take on multiple levels.

Despite the abundance of research on the processes and outcomes of immigrant integration, surprisingly, a theoretical definition of the concept of integration is scarce to find. Castles and his colleagues argue that "there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated" (Castles et al. 2002:14). Often, scholars mention this difficulty briefly and move on to dimensions and measurements of integration (Ager and Strang 2008, Şimşek and Çorabatır 2016). For example, Ager and Strang (2008) propose ten key domains of integration related to four overall themes: (1) Markers and means: employment, housing, education, and health; (2) Social connection: social bridges, social bonds, and social links; (3) facilitators: language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability; and (4) foundation: rights and citizenship.

Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas define integration as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016:14). They propose "a disaggregated approach to the concept of integration, distinguishing three dimensions (the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious), two parties (the immigrants and the receiving society), and three levels (individuals, organizations, and institutions)" (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016:26). Thus, integration is a multidimensional, non-linear, two-way process of social change in interaction with the host society. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) suggests that migrants should "have equal opportunities to lead just as dignified, independent and active lives as the rest of the population" (MIPEX 2015).

Scholars use different variables to measure integration. For example, in their review, Waters and Jimenez (2005) identify four primary dimensions such as socioeconomic status, residential integration, language, and intermarriage. In their comparison of the U.S. and Germany, Kurthen and Schmitter Heisler (2009) examine economic integration (e.g., labor force